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MAY 2025

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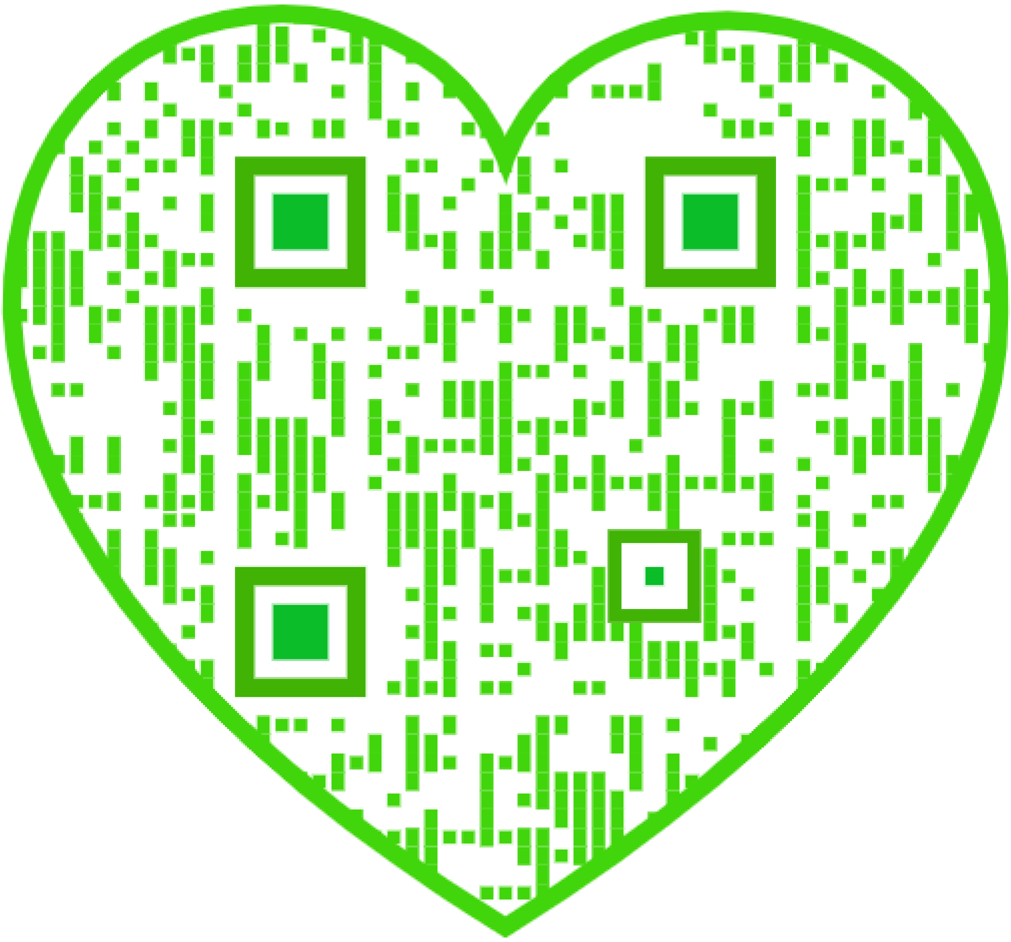

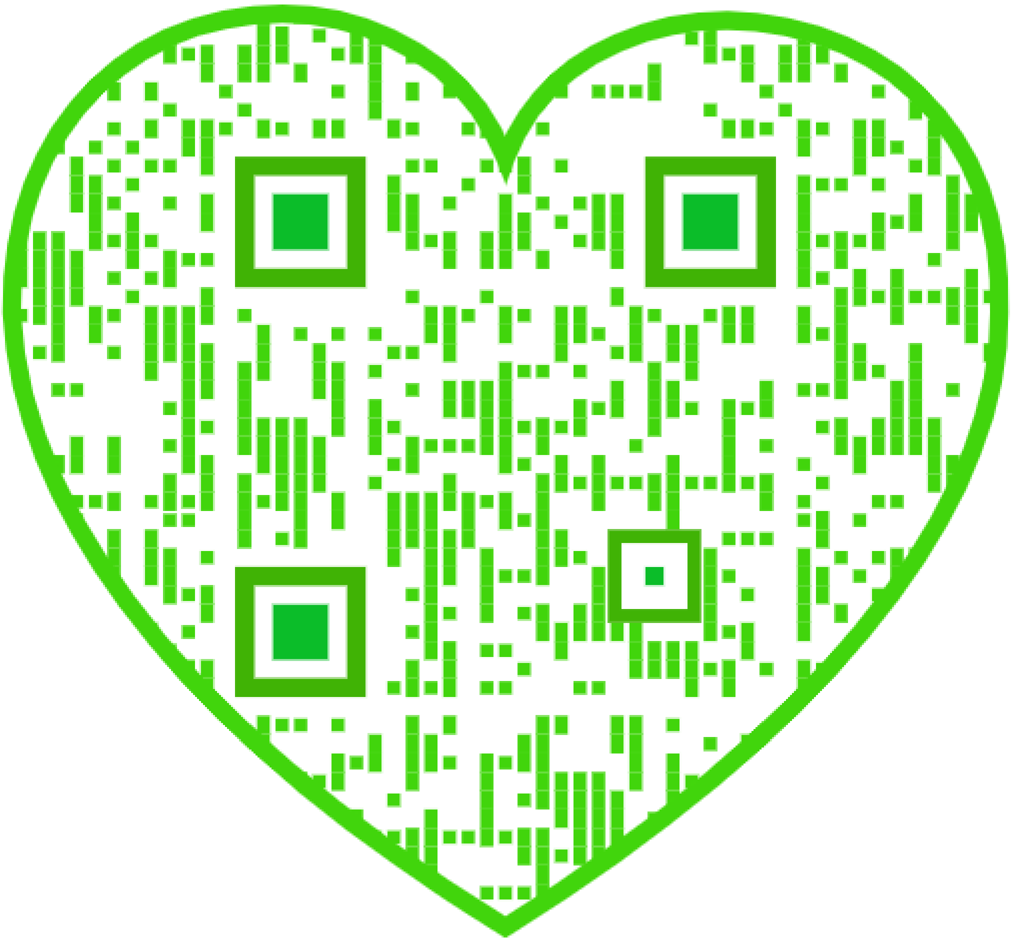

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Welcome to May

I love May. It's the time of year when our gardens are getting into their stride, there's the chance of some fine weather and, for many of us, the two bank holidays allow us to extend our weekends and be outdoors more – whether that's in our own gardens or visiting others for inspiration.

I find that time spent in my own garden can be a bit of a balancing act during May – between allowing myself to sit, relax and enjoy being outside, and frantically making sure I feel on top of all the necessary spring tasks. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy getting stuck into all these jobs, and there's so much **satisfaction, joy and creativity** to gain from gardening just now, but I know I need to just stop and take a breath more often. Many call it being mindful, including Ashley Edwards on p106, so check out his wise words if, like me, you could do with slowing things down a bit.

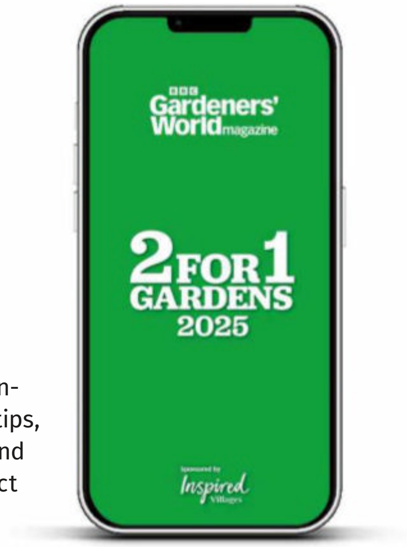
When it comes to visiting other gardens, I have a simple goal for this year – to do more of it! Admittedly, not everyone in my family is a garden lover, but we do all enjoy a picnic and a cracking day out, so I'm determined to make the most of all that our legendary **2 for 1 Gardens** scheme (and the fab new app) has to offer. I love how visiting a garden always fills me with masses of **planting and design ideas**, and the very act of getting out for the day forces me to relax and spend more time interacting with the people closest to me, which can only be a good thing.

So, hurrah for gardens! Whether you're spending time in your own or somebody else's, be sure to soak it all up.

Kevin

Kevin Smith, Editor
@kevinsmithgarden

PS... Don't forget to download your 2 for 1 Gardens app for garden-visiting information at your fingertips, and to filter gardens by facilities and counties so you can find the perfect garden for your next day out.



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EDITOR'S PORTRAIT: JASON INGRAM. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM. ILLUSTRATION: GETTY

*EXCLUSIONS APPLY – SEE PAGE 151 FOR MORE DETAILS

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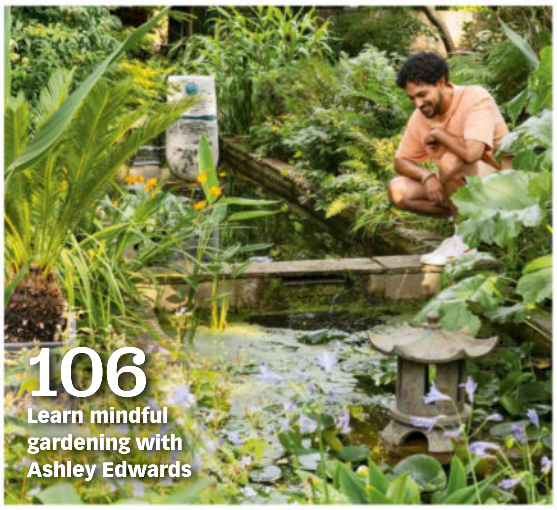

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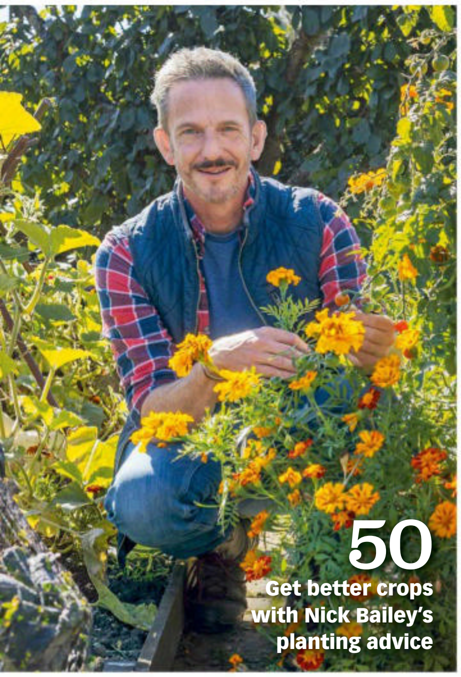

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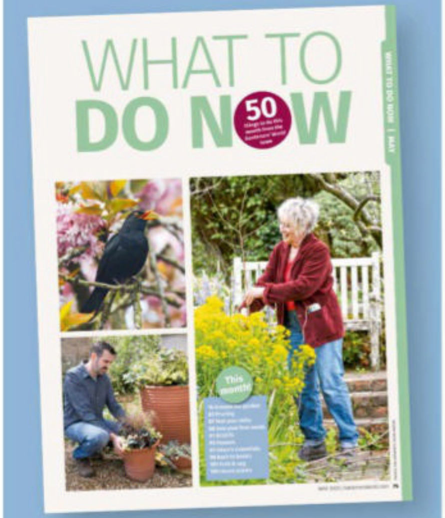

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On the cover

Rosa 'Rhapsody in Blue' photo by Gap Photos/ Dianna Jazwinski

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roses
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“The month of May is the gateway to summer”

Jean Hersey

We love May

May is a gift for writers of low-quality poetry. There are many things that rhyme with May, so putting together a passionate poem, an overwhelming ode or a sentimental sonnet is so much easier; for example, “A roll in the hay, in May”. Too raunchy? How about “In May I swim, the fjords of Norway”. Not bad. “To me, in May, you are as good as cabaret or a corps de ballet.” Now we’re getting there. Have a good month: if not writing bad poetry, then at least there’s loads to keep you going in the garden.

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

STAR OF THE MONTH

Iris ‘Tropic Night’

This is the Siberian Iris (although it grows across most of Europe as well), so you know that it is going to be pretty tough and resilient. In the wild it colonises damp meadows, so if you have anything even faintly resembling such a place in your garden then this would be a good addition – maybe a bit of badly draining ground or where a water butt overflows? Not one for everybody, but if you are lucky enough then just imagine long grass studded with these intricate and beautiful flowers. Grow alongside lythrum and meadowsweet, which will keep the colour going after the iris finishes blooming.

Divide plants when the centre dies out. New plants can take a couple of years to start flowering.

Height x Spread 1.2m x 90cm

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

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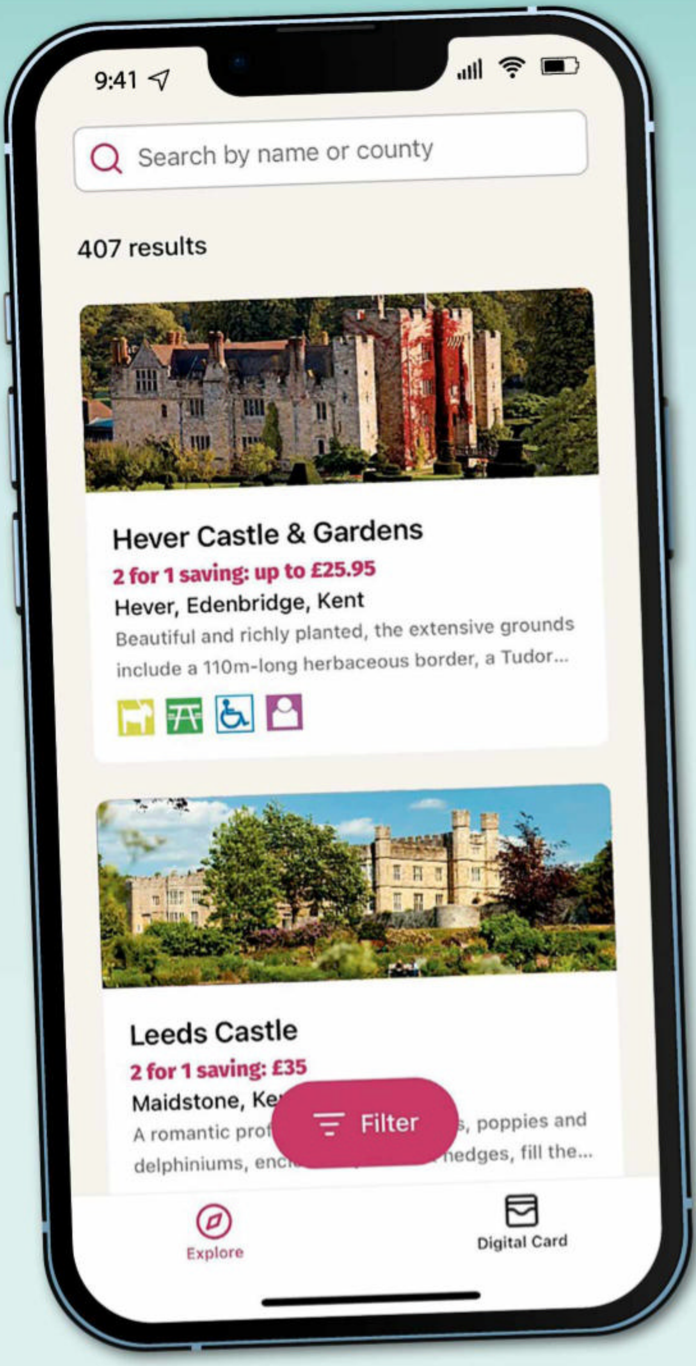

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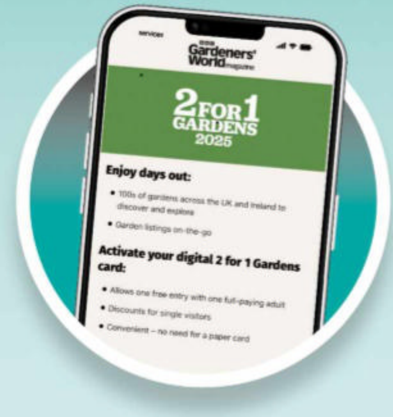

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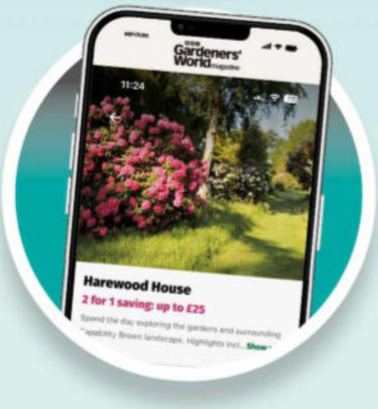

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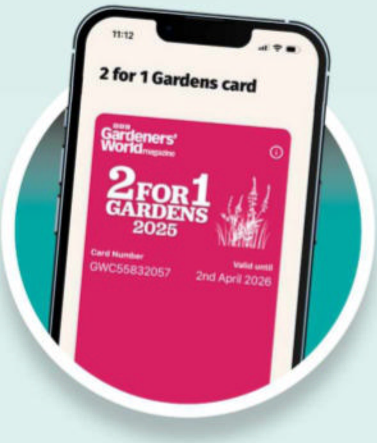

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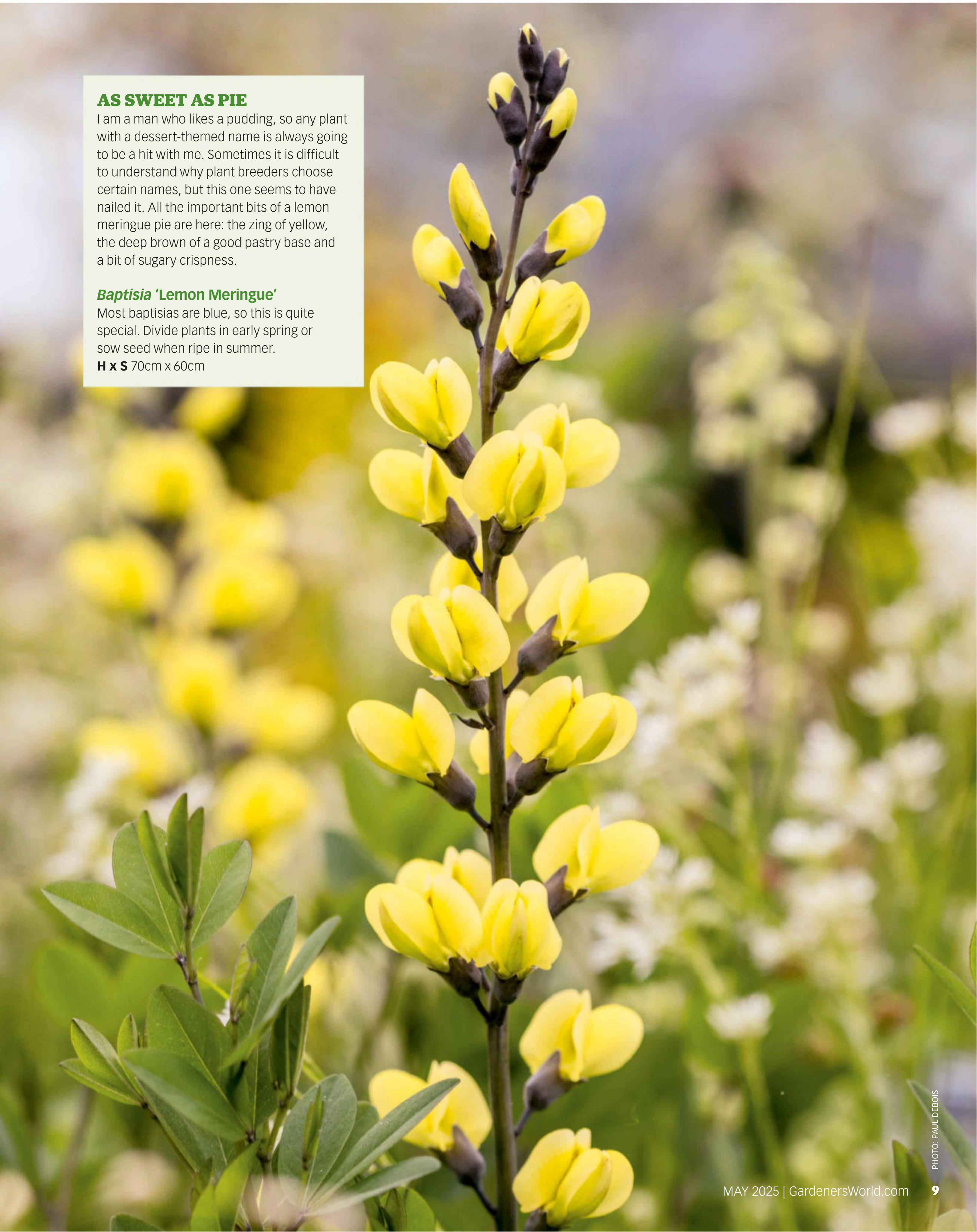

AS SWEET AS PIE

I am a man who likes a pudding, so any plant with a dessert-themed name is always going to be a hit with me. Sometimes it is difficult to understand why plant breeders choose certain names, but this one seems to have nailed it. All the important bits of a lemon meringue pie are here: the zing of yellow, the deep brown of a good pastry base and a bit of sugary crispness.

Baptisia 'Lemon Meringue'

Most baptisias are blue, so this is quite special. Divide plants in early spring or sow seed when ripe in summer.
H x S 70cm x 60cm

PHOTO: PAUL DEBOIS

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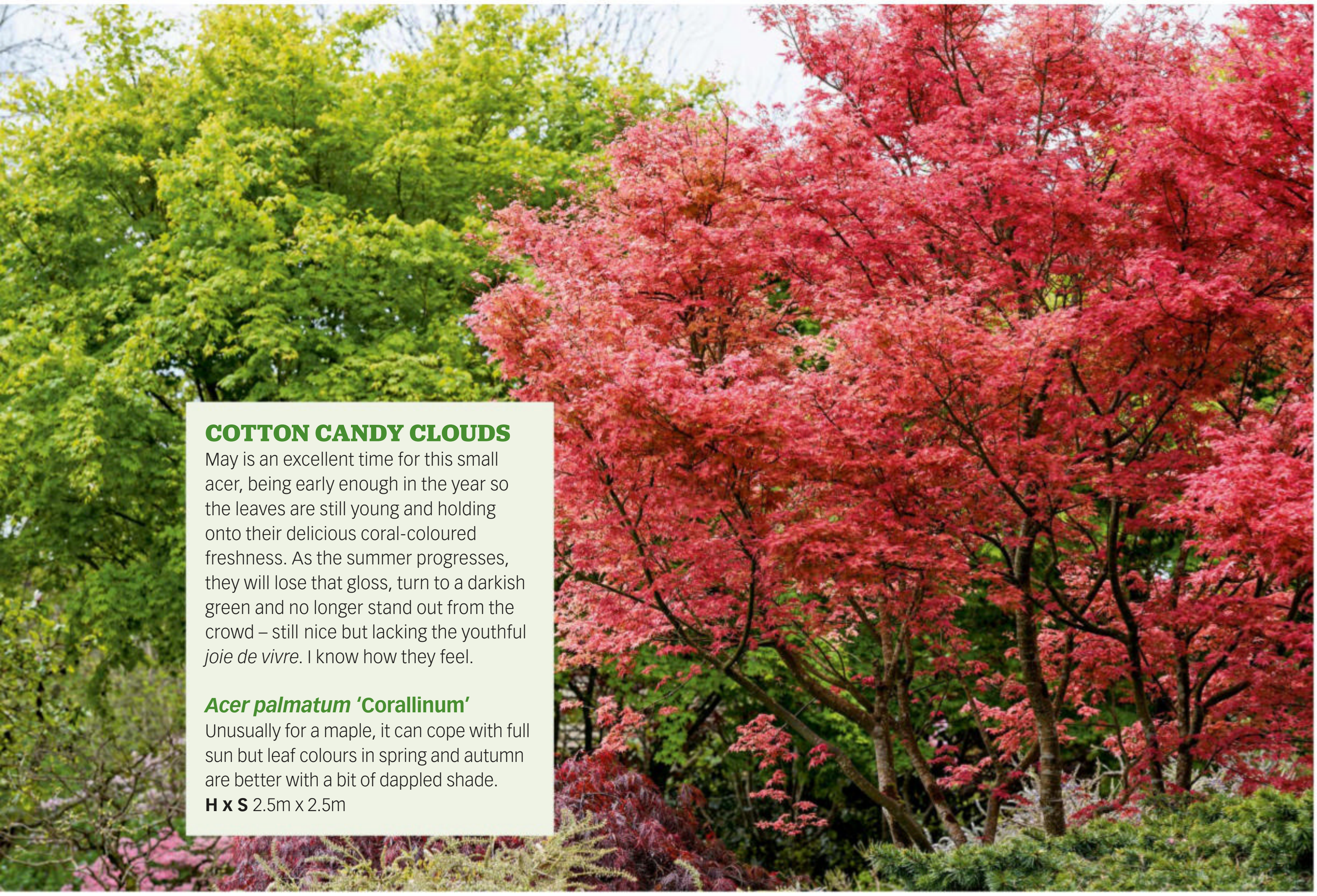
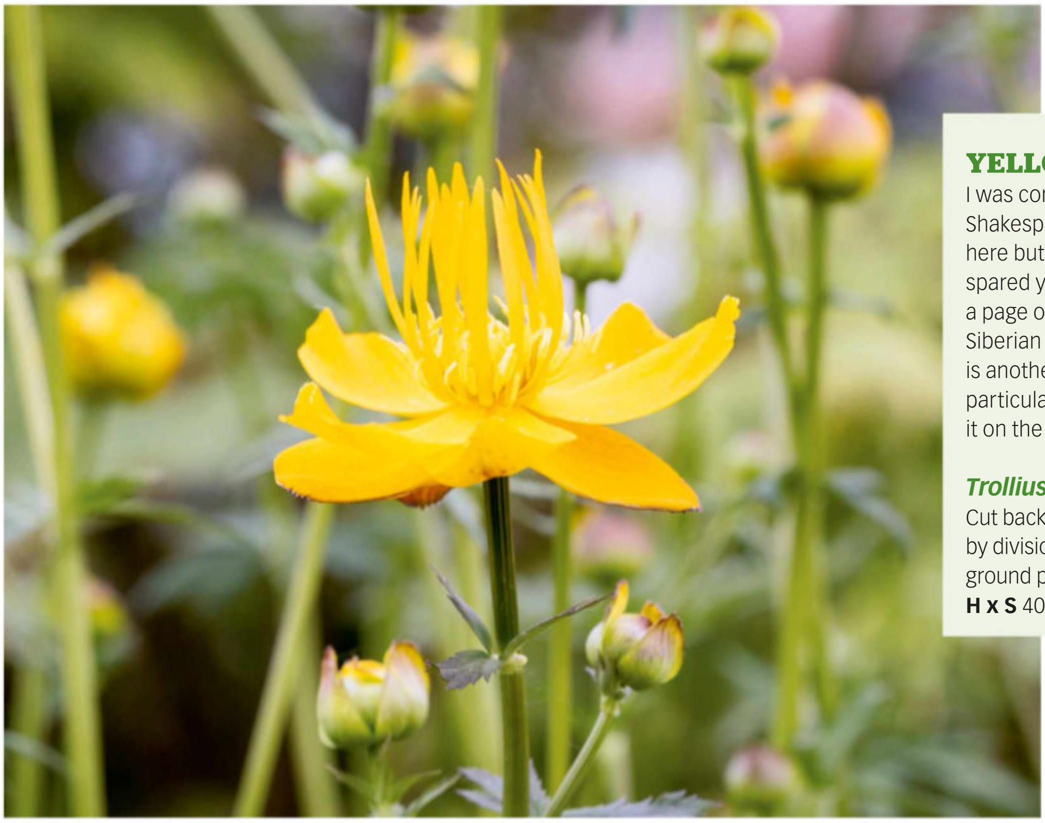


COTTON CANDY CLOUDS

May is an excellent time for this small acer, being early enough in the year so the leaves are still young and holding onto their delicious coral-coloured freshness. As the summer progresses, they will lose that gloss, turn to a darkish green and no longer stand out from the crowd – still nice but lacking the youthful *joie de vivre*. I know how they feel.

Acer palmatum 'Corallinum'

Unusually for a maple, it can cope with full sun but leaf colours in spring and autumn are better with a bit of dappled shade.
H x S 2.5m x 2.5m



YELLOW POPSICLE

I was considering going on about Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* here but the spelling is wrong, so I have spared you that ordeal. If you go back a page or two you will read the bit about Siberian irises in a damp meadow: this is another plant that would suit that particular situation. You could also try it on the edge of a pond in full sunshine.

Trollius chinensis

Cut back hard after flowering. Propagate by division in spring. Like most damp ground plants it grows fast.
H x S 40cm x 30cm

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

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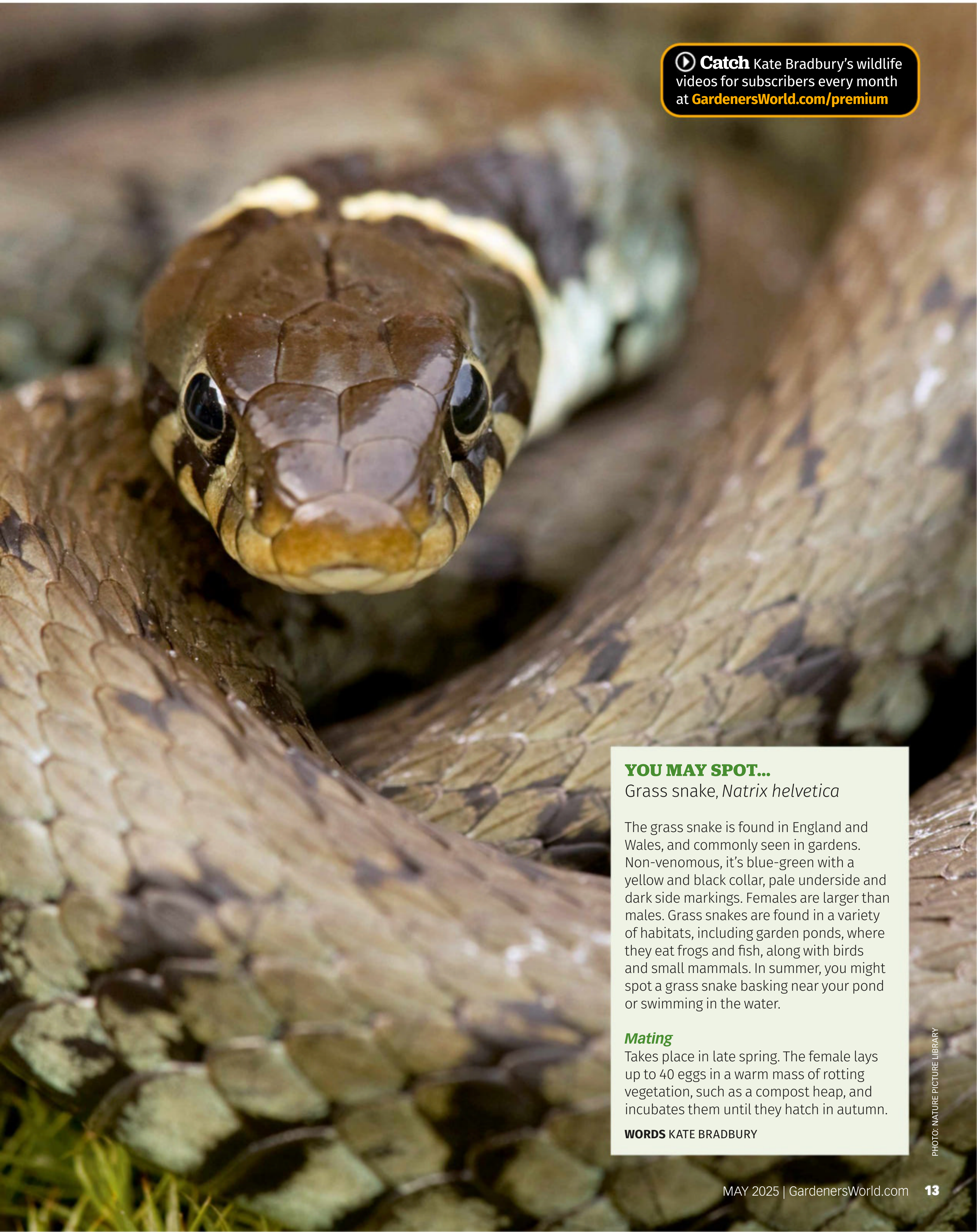

Catch Kate Bradbury's wildlife videos for subscribers every month at **GardenersWorld.com/premium**

YOU MAY SPOT…

Grass snake, *Natrix helvetica*

The grass snake is found in England and Wales, and commonly seen in gardens. Non-venomous, it's blue-green with a yellow and black collar, pale underside and dark side markings. Females are larger than males. Grass snakes are found in a variety of habitats, including garden ponds, where they eat frogs and fish, along with birds and small mammals. In summer, you might spot a grass snake basking near your pond or swimming in the water.

Mating

Takes place in late spring. The female lays up to 40 eggs in a warm mass of rotting vegetation, such as a compost heap, and incubates them until they hatch in autumn.

WORDS KATE BRADBURY

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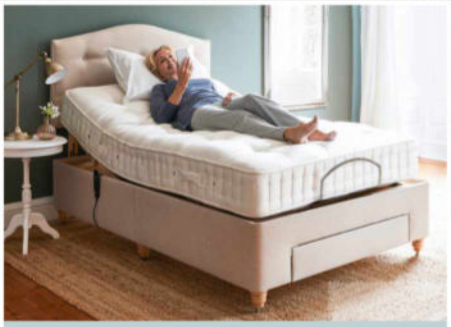

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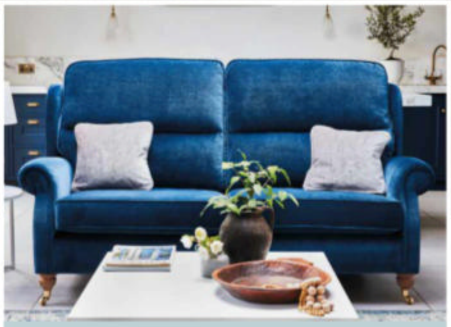

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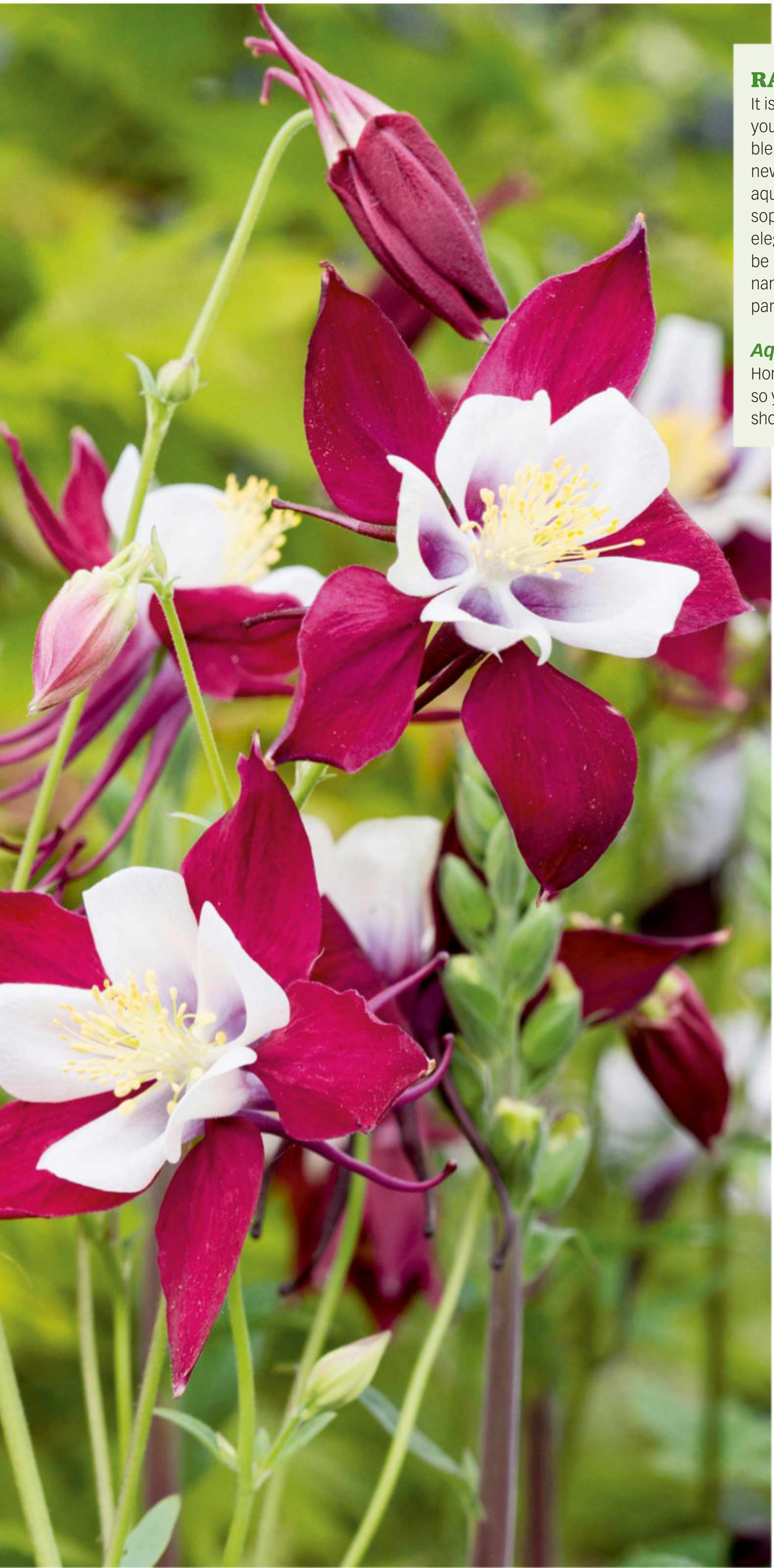
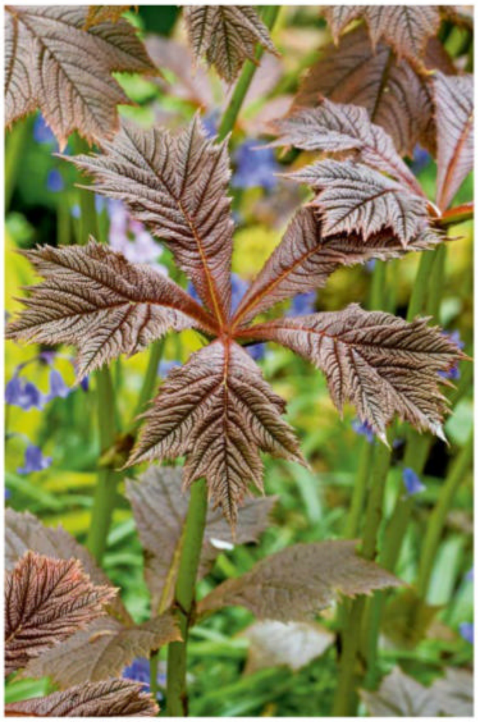


RASPBERRY RIPPLE

It is true that with some varieties, once you have one aquilegia then you will be blessed with aquilegias forever. Bad news, people, this is not one of those aquilegias. Sorry. This is a more sophisticated version with very long and elegant spurs – to call them talons may be more appropriate as the plant gets its name from the Latin for eagle. Their wild parents are pollinated by hummingbirds.

***Aquilegia* 'Crimson Star'**

Home-saved seed is unlikely to come true so you will have to buy more. Perennial but short lived. **H x S** 60cm x 35cm



TAFFY TREAT

Another plant for a damp corner – bit of a theme this month – this variety has very handsome foliage. I particularly like the way that the young leaves (as seen here) are a bit wrinkled and creased, like a Shar Pei puppy waking up from a short post-lunch snooze beneath a deckchair. They lose that wrinkling as they get older (the leaves, not the puppies) but are still architectural. A white flower will follow next month.

***Rodgersia podophylla* 'Rotlaub'**

Don't let it dry out, so mulch generously with compost or other organic matter. Divide in spring. **H x S** 1.2m x 1m

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

A POT FOR MAY

Colour confidence

Turn up the volume on summer with this colourful pot for a sun-filled spot. *Dianthus carthusianorum* has captivating flowers that are an unusually bright neon pink and in this terracotta pot I've paired it with ladybird poppies that have a similar intensity of colour. White umbels of *Orlaya grandiflora* lift the scheme and add movement, keeping it airy and bright. The decorative, scalloped lip of the pot is enough to give it character but without taking attention too far away from the plants.

Choose a pot with enough depth of compost to accommodate the plants' water-seeking roots and use a gritty compost mix: one part compost to one part grit. Otherwise, all this pot needs is watering twice a week.

Growing tips

Deadhead the orlaya and poppy to encourage them to repeat flower. Position the plants closely together from the start to cover the soil and keep watering at a minimum.

WORDS LUCY BELLAMY

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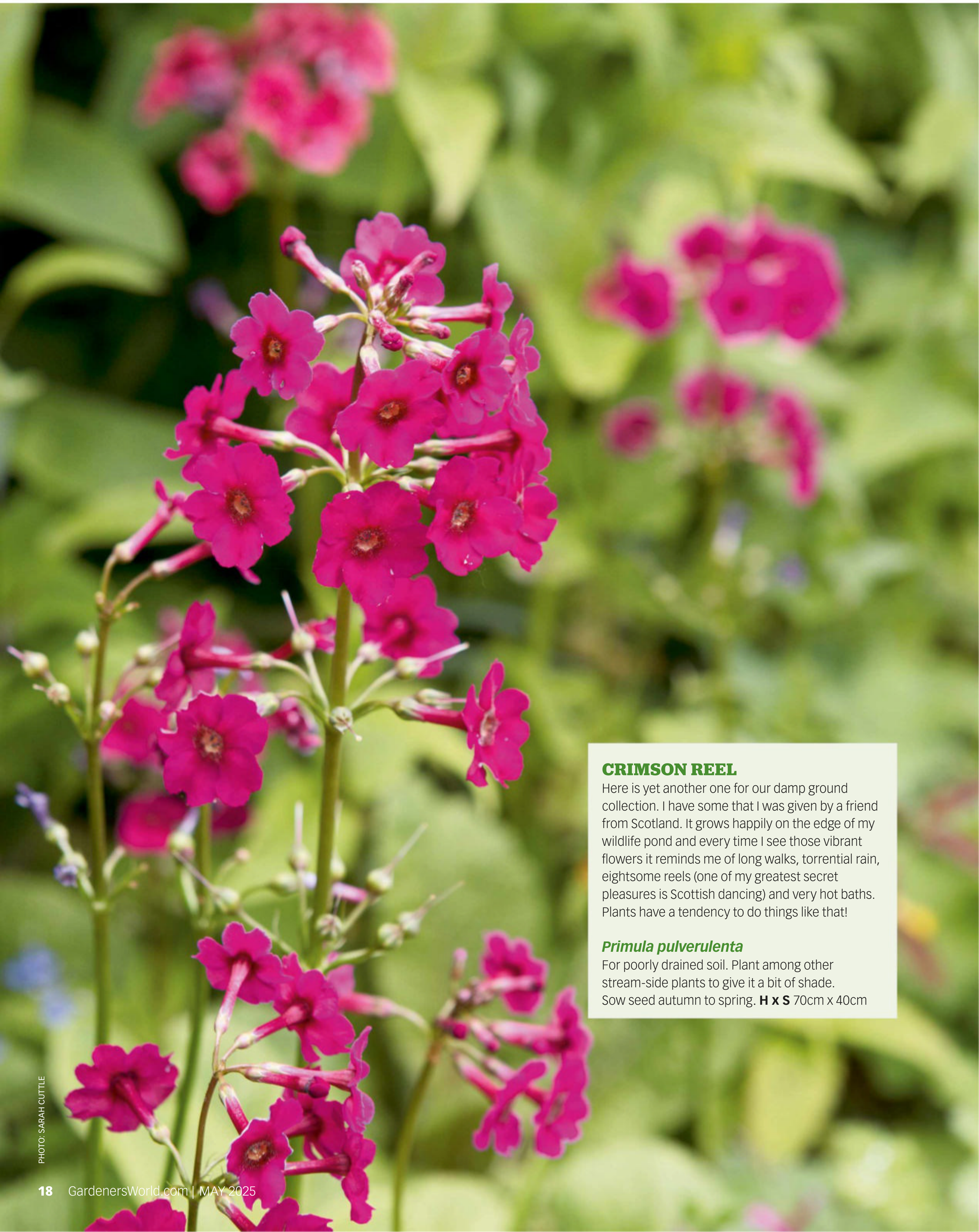

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE

CRIMSON REEL

Here is yet another one for our damp ground collection. I have some that I was given by a friend from Scotland. It grows happily on the edge of my wildlife pond and every time I see those vibrant flowers it reminds me of long walks, torrential rain, eightsome reels (one of my greatest secret pleasures is Scottish dancing) and very hot baths. Plants have a tendency to do things like that!

Primula pulverulenta

For poorly drained soil. Plant among other stream-side plants to give it a bit of shade. Sow seed autumn to spring. **H x S** 70cm x 40cm

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The Full Monty

Despite increasing prices, growing from seed is still the most cost-effective way of raising a garden, says **Monty** – even better if you produce your own seeds

I buy scores of packets of seeds every year and raise thousands of plants from them. In fact, the majority of plants grown at Longmeadow have been raised from seed. It is unquestionably the cheapest way of purchasing plants for your garden, and I want to encourage more and more gardeners – especially the younger generation – to raise plants from seeds as a hugely rewarding aspect of making a garden, even on the tightest budget. But over the past few years it has become noticeably more expensive.

This seems to manifest itself in two ways: the cost of each packet is increasing; or the number of seeds per packet is decreasing. In other words, each seed is costing more. While the ratio of price to seed varies from variety to variety, sometimes this reduction in seeds is farcical. It is not unusual now to buy a packet of tomato seeds to find, hidden in a fold at the bottom of the packet, barely 10 seeds. Earlier this spring I was sowing ammi seeds, and when I opened the packet and peered into its depths I could just make out the few tiny specks that made up the entirety of its contents. The packet itself was big, well designed and seductively attractive, and this seems to be becoming a trend – the fewer the seeds, the fancier the packet.

I do not blame the seed companies. I am sure that they are not benefiting from this trend. But the business reality is that if costs go up, either the price has to rise accordingly or the quantity of seeds goes down. Our climate does not allow a long enough summer season for plants to reliably grow and ripen, so a great deal of the seeds sold in this country are produced in the southern hemisphere or China, and most sold through vast wholesalers and then packaged here. Since Brexit, the costs and bureaucracy around importing seeds and plants have risen, and seems to still be wrapped up in chaos and delay, and all this adds to costs. Seeds also have a shelf life and yet have to be ordered way in advance, so there is inevitably wastage. I remember visiting a seed company in Torquay in the early 1990s and seeing a large skip filled with seed packets past their sell-by date. Again, this carries a cost that is passed on to the consumer.

There are still a number of small but excellent suppliers producing seeds in the UK, many of which are collected from plants they grow themselves and, as most of them have websites and sell online, it is not difficult to access them. I would urge gardeners to support them wherever possible. But you need a licence to sell seeds, and only varieties that are approved are allowed to be sold on any scale. The upshot of this is that hundreds of varieties that used to be widely grown have been lost. Many of the remaining rare heritage varieties have survived by being given and swapped by dedicated private growers rather than sold on the open market. Keeping this diversity is essential because the fewer varieties we have, then the less resilience there is and the greater the threat of disease or pests. One way to ensure that we have as great a range of seeds as possible is to make them more easily available.

> *“We should be seeking out the unusual – especially seed that has originated locally”*

I would stress that despite all this, the most expensive seed available still makes for cheap plants. I shall continue to buy my seeds from a wide variety of sources – although always organic wherever available – and continue to get as much pleasure from raising plants of every kind from them and urge you to do the same. The whole process of carefully sprinkling seeds over a tray of compost (peat-free of course), seeing them germinate, pricking out the seedlings, potting them on, hardening them off and then planting them out into the big bad world of a border before watching them flourish and grow into either a delicious harvest or stunning display, is one that captivates me and millions of other gardeners.

Increasingly, I think that we should be seeking out the unusual and particular – and especially seed that has originated locally. By far the best way to do this is to produce our own seed wherever possible and share the excess with local gardeners. This has the great advantage of not just saving money, but it is also a sure way of raising plants that thrive in our particular soil and microclimate and that, in a virtuous circle, will go on to produce more seed that will increasingly be adapted to your specific garden.

Monty

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

BBC TWO

MONTY ON TV Monty and the GW team are back on our screens every Friday. And don't miss Monty's new podcast in our Spring Conversations series at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

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WORTH £19.96

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The instantly recognisable scent of a lavender bush brings summer gardens to life, and the butterflies and bees love them too!

The collection contains:

- **Lavender 'Hidcote'** x 18 (right)
With its compact habit and dark purple flower spikes, this must be one of the nation's best known varieties of English lavender. The fragrant stems are ideal for cutting or drying, and the nectar-rich flowers are particularly attractive to bees.
Height x Spread
60cm x 75cm
Flowers Jul-Sep

- **Lavender 'Munstead'** x 6
This neat, compact variety of English lavender bears masses of dark purple-blue flower spikes. Loved by pollinators, this plant is great in a floral display but also makes an excellent low hedge or path edging, allowing the perfume to be appreciated as you brush past the aromatic evergreen foliage.
H x S 45cm x 60cm **F** Jul-Sep

Supplied as 3-6cm plug plants

For more offers and details of how to order, see opposite page

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Digitalis 'Candy Mountain'

Rose-pink blooms with freckled throats that appear around the stems.

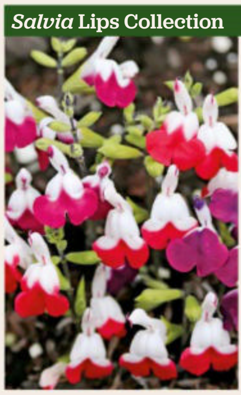
H x S 1.4m x 45cm

F Jun-Jul

■ 12 Postiplugs **£8.99** ~~£17.98~~ **SAVE £8.99** *(KB9547)*

■ 24 Postiplugs ~~£35.97~~ **£12.99** **SAVE £22.98** *(KB7909)*

Salvia Lips Collection



Bicolour, nectar-rich blooms make a showy display. Much loved by pollinators.

H x S 90cm x 60cm

F Jul-Oct

■ 3 jumbo plugs **£9.99** *(KB8512)*

■ 9 jumbo plugs ~~£29.97~~ **£16.99** **SAVE £12.98** *(KB8513)*

Coreopsis Golden Joy

Colourful, long-blooming flowers. Low maintenance and easy to grow in most soil types.

H x S 45cm x 40cm

F Jun-Sep

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Begonia Apricot Shades

Large, cascading blooms that pour from your containers well into winter.

H x S 30cm x 45cm

F Jun-Oct

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Perfect for filling beds, borders and patio containers.

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F Jun-Oct

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Expert's choice

Wisteria

With cascades of scented flowers in purples, whites and pinks, this vigorous climber brings drama to the garden, says **Graham Rice**

Wisterias. Perhaps the most dramatic climbers we can grow. Spectacular when properly pruned and trained, but rampageous thugs if abandoned to their own devices. Where next after the chimney pot? Under the tiles?

So, although some wisterias are naturally more vigorous than others, it's safest to consider all of them to be very strong growing – 8m or more – and in need of repeated pruning to keep them down to a more manageable 3m.

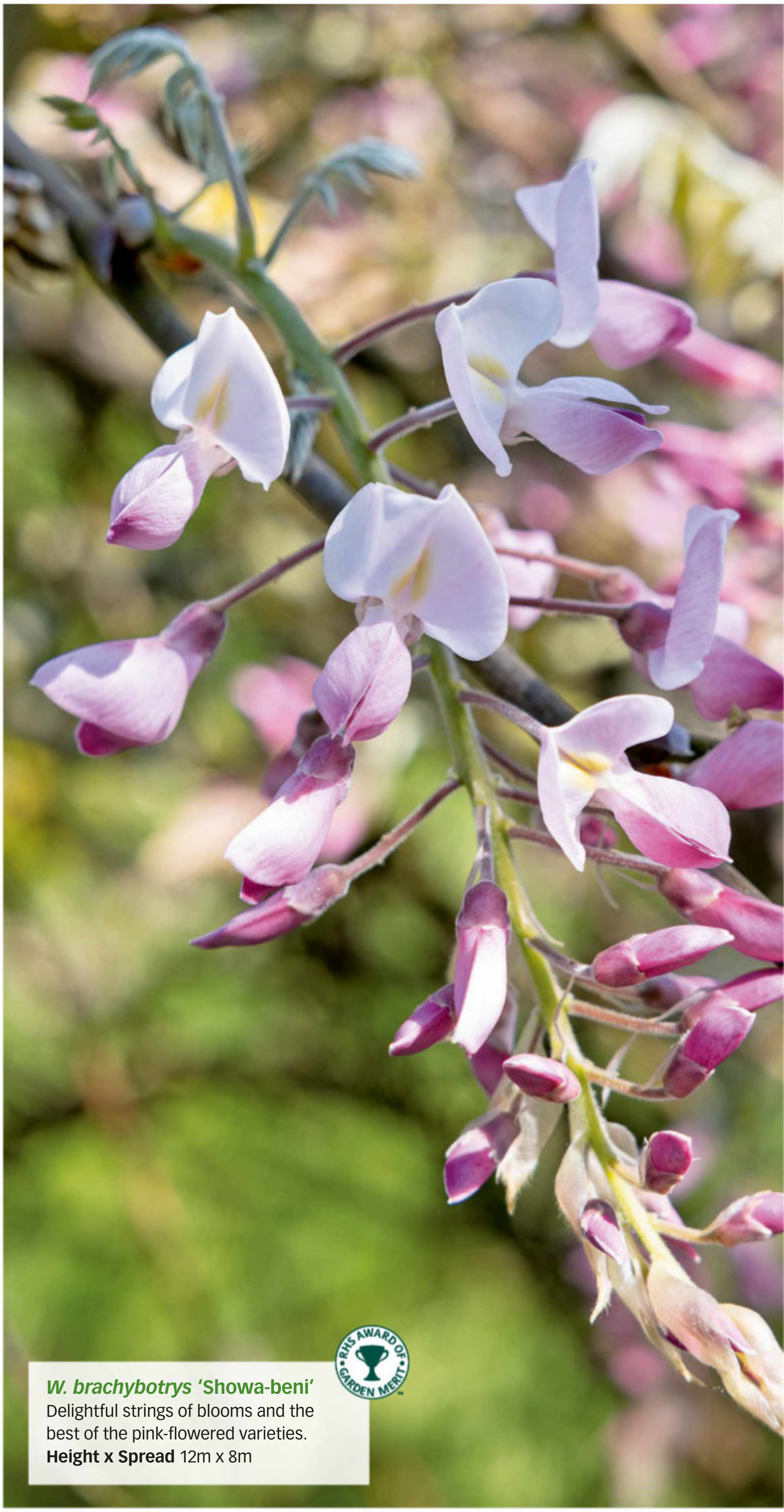
All are colourful. Choose the colour you prefer, from deepest purple through blues and lilac shades to pinks and white. But are some more stunning than others? Setting aside *Wisteria frutescens*, which flowers later than all the others and usually only blooms well after a very hot summer, the varieties of *W. brachybotrys* have the shortest racemes (strings of flowers), varieties of *W. floribunda* usually have the longest (up to 1m long!), while those of *W. sinensis* are in between.

And the stems twine, but which way? Does it even matter? Most twine anti-clockwise, if you can imagine looking down on the new shoots from above, except for *W. floribunda,* which twines clockwise – not, to be honest, that it matters much. Knowing this always helps you show off, but do you know which way bindweed twines? No, of course, you don't have any...

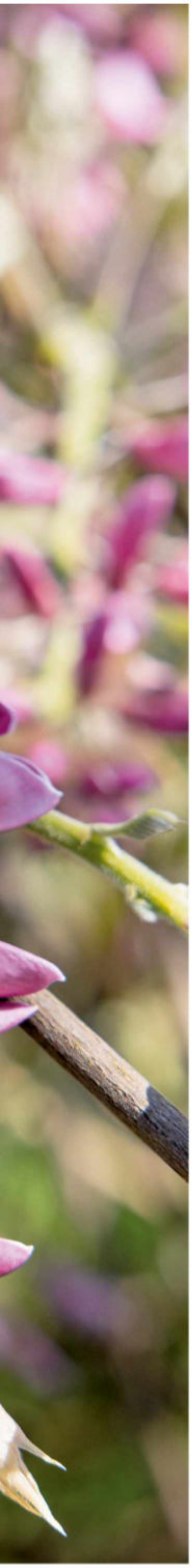
Care

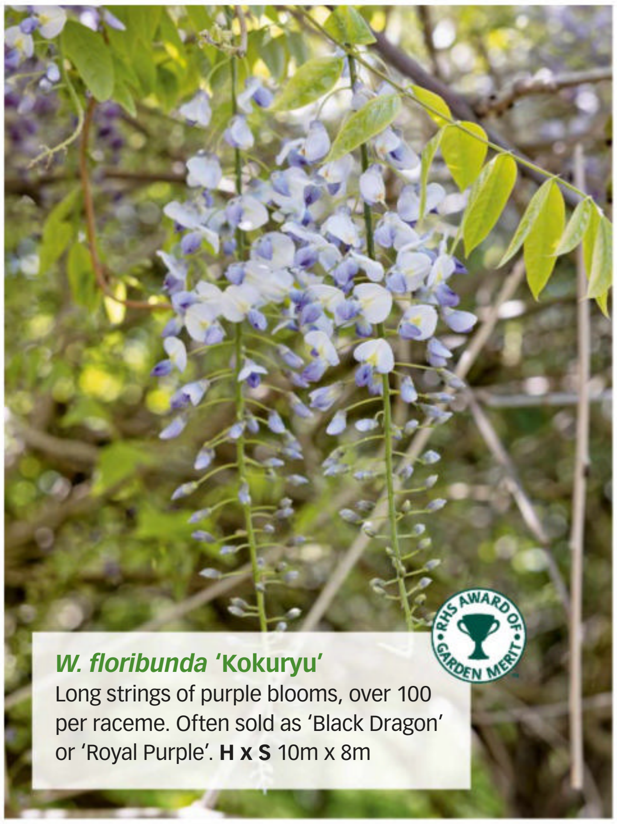
- Plant in a sunny site, in fertile but free-draining soil. All are rated RHS H6.
- Train early growth thoughtfully, but you'll need to wait a few years for the first flowers.
- Regular pruning will keep maturing wisteria to a manageable size and flowering prolifically. Cut back new growth in July/August, then trim long growth in winter. For more detailed pruning guidance, go to **bit.ly/grow-wisteria**

- **Where to buy** bluebellnursery.com, 01530 413700; burncoose.co.uk, 01209 860316; crocus.co.uk, 01344 578000

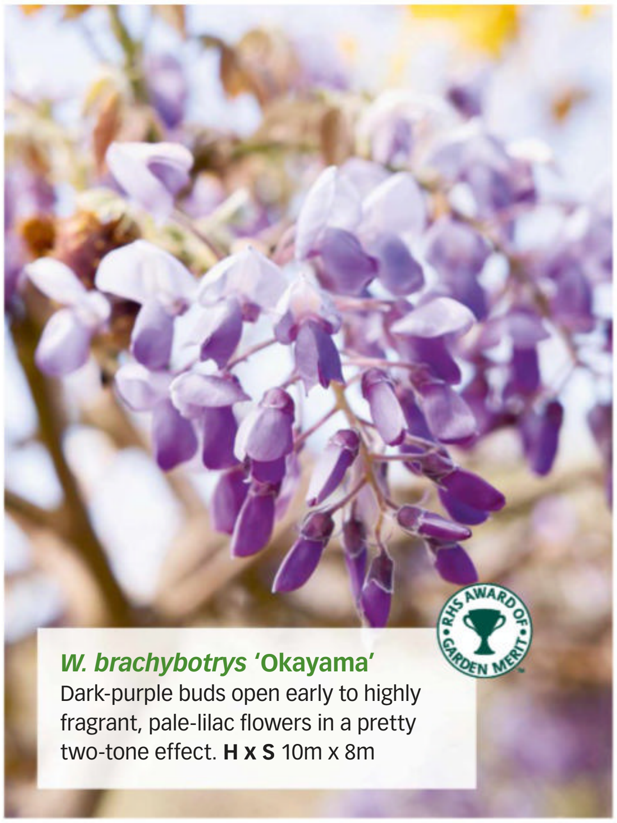


***W. brachybotrys* 'Showa-beni'**
Delightful strings of blooms and the best of the pink-flowered varieties.
Height x Spread 12m x 8m

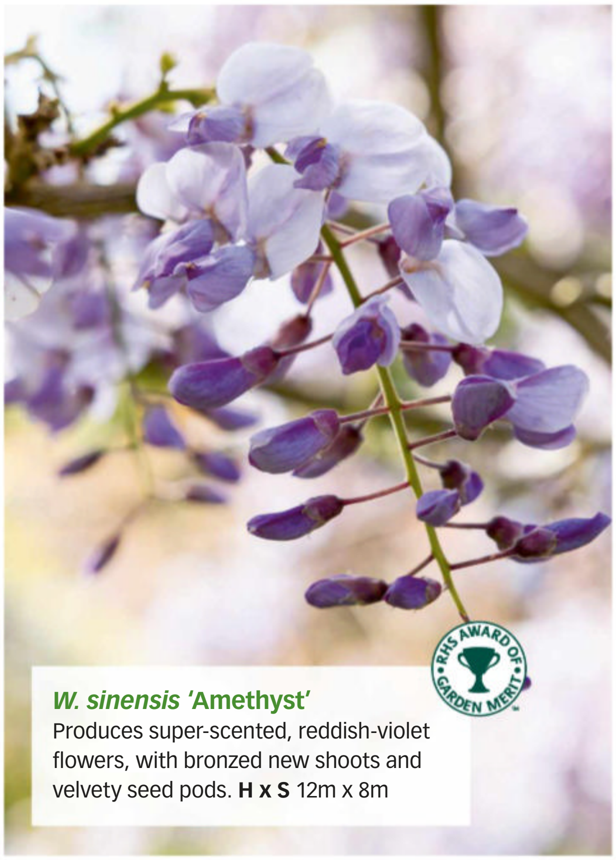




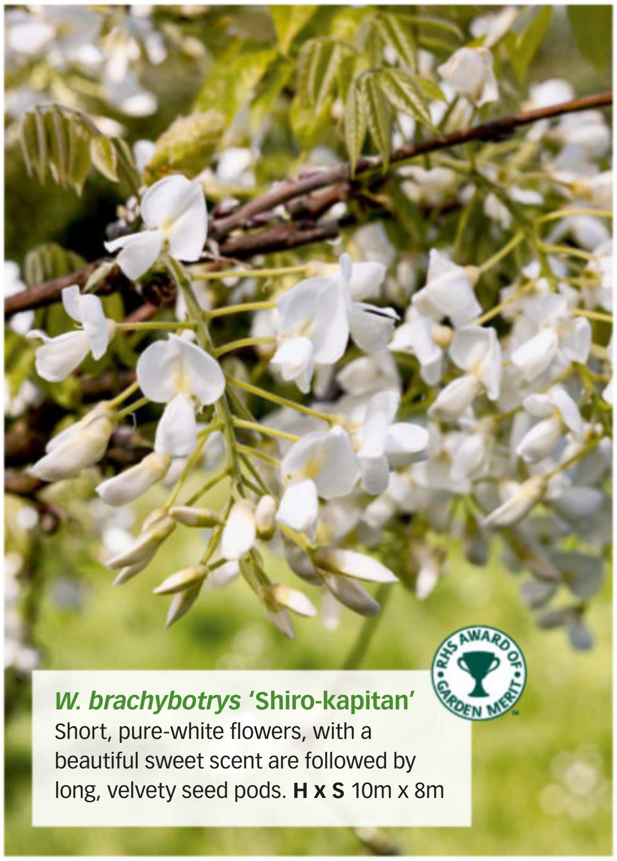
W. floribunda 'Kokuryu'
Long strings of purple blooms, over 100 per raceme. Often sold as 'Black Dragon' or 'Royal Purple'. **H x S** 10m x 8m



W. brachybotrys 'Okayama'
Dark-purple buds open early to highly fragrant, pale-lilac flowers in a pretty two-tone effect. **H x S** 10m x 8m



W. sinensis 'Amethyst'
Produces super-scented, reddish-violet flowers, with bronzed new shoots and velvety seed pods. **H x S** 12m x 8m



W. brachybotrys 'Shiro-kapitan'
Short, pure-white flowers, with a beautiful sweet scent are followed by long, velvety seed pods. **H x S** 10m x 8m

Wisteria

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Flowering				🟩	🟩	🟩						
Pruning		🟥					🟥					

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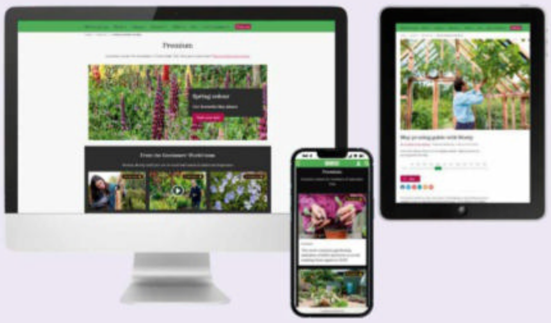

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Apricot Shades

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These petunias are renowned for their extraordinary flower power, weather resistance, colour range and versatility.

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COLLECTION INCLUDES ONE PACK EACH OF:

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Beetroot 'Boltardy'

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Dwarf French bean Slenderette

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2 for 1 Gardens

BBC
Gardeners' World magazine
2 FOR 1 GARDENS 2025
REUSABLE CARD valid until 2 April 2026
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Across the seasons

As a new year of **2 for 1 Gardens** begins, here are some of the many seasonal delights awaiting you. You can use your **2 for 1 Gardens** entry card to save money on garden visits until 2 April 2026, so make the most of every season

SAVE £12.50

SPRING

Magnificient magnolias

Only open until 8 June, **Caerhays Castle Gardens** in Cornwall come alive in spring. They are home to a National Collection of magnolias, with more than 40 species, including many huge and venerable trees that are over 100 years old. The flowers come in many shades of pink and white, as well as butter yellow, all contrasting beautifully with bright blue skies. These gardens also feature many other spring favourites, including camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas, as well as tree ferns and champion trees. Follow any of the marked paths to enjoy the impressive spring spectacle.

OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £12.50. Booking recommended.
visit.caerhays.co.uk

PHOTOS: CHARLIE HARPUR; NATIONAL TRUST/ANDREW BUTLER

SUMMER

Wild at heart

Discover what happens when nature is allowed to find its own way, on a booked visit to **Knepp's Rewilded Walled Garden** in West Sussex. New to the **2 for 1 Guide** this year, this garden is a separate part of the 3,500-acre Knepp Estate, whose pioneering large-scale rewilding project featured in the film *Wilding*.

The rewilding of Knepp's walled garden – a project masterminded by Tom Stuart-Smith and James Hitchmough – is equally innovative and inspirational. Its undulating landscape was created using crushed building waste from other parts of the estate, and nearly 900 carefully chosen plant species were added, to suit the wide range of individual habitats within the site. The result is a climate-resilient and nature-friendly garden full of beauty and inspiration.

OFFER Self-guided garden visit: 2 for 1 £30. Booking essential – see website for dates and time slots, and use code GW2for1. Offer availability limited – full details at **knepp.co.uk/garden-visits**

SAVE £30

Poet's corner

SAVE £9

Joining **2 for 1 Gardens** this year is **Sissinghurst Castle Garden** in Kent. This world-famous garden was created in 1930 by poet and writer Vita Sackville-West and her author husband Harold Nicolson. The pair lovingly designed 10 different garden rooms, to ensure interest across the seasons.

Summer, though, is perhaps the best time to enjoy a visit to Sissinghurst. One of its most famous features is the white garden, where Vita used a palette of only white and green to dramatic effect. Elegant white gladioli, billowing roses and Japanese anemones are among its summer stars, contrasting with the structural dark green yew hedging.

OFFER House & garden: 2 for 1 £9. Parking £4. **nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst**

Summer romance

SAVE £28

Few things are more synonymous with an English garden than roses, and at **Haddon Hall** in Derbyshire they aren't in short supply.
Visit in June and July and you'll find a romantic profusion of pink and red roses adorning the walls of this historic manor house. Beyond the house are five elegant terraces leading down to the river Wye and offering views over the parkland. Two of these have been transformed by designer Arne Maynard, and at the height of summer they welcome you with borders overflowing with wildflowers, roses and medicinal dye plants from the 16th century, as well as a knot garden and topiary.

OFFER House & garden: 2 for 1 £28. Under-16s free. Offer valid until 31 August only.
haddonhall.co.uk

AUTUMN

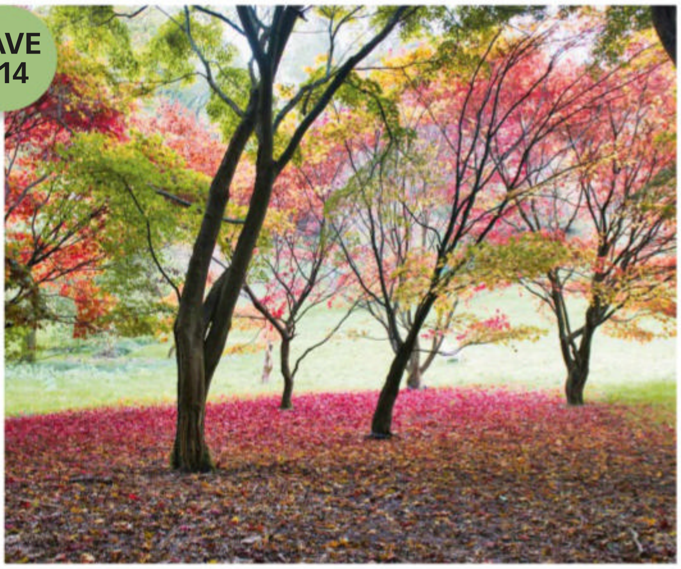
A living work of art

SAVE £14

Winkworth Arboretum in Surrey offers an autumnal spectacular of vibrant oranges, reds and yellows. Created in the early 20th century by Dr Wilfrid Fox, a local resident and doctor who felt passionately about protecting woodland, this impressive collection of trees and shrubs now comprises over 1,000 species and is looked after by the National Trust. During September and October, the landscape is awash with colour, including Japanese maples with foliage of fiery oranges, golds and scarlets, while the jewel-like berries of hollies, rowans and Chinese dogwoods sparkle in the autumn sunshine.

Head up to the viewpoint on the edge of Magnolia Wood to take in the whole spectacle – the colours and textures of the autumnal treescape rival even the most famous masterpieces.

OFFER Arboretum: 2 for 1 £14, single reduced to £7.
nationaltrust.org.uk/ winkworth-arboretum



PHOTOS: MARCH CREATIVE; PEAKLASS

SAVE £10

Treasury of trees

The spectacular result of 300 years of tree planting, **Dawyck Botanic Garden**, nestled in the Scottish borders, is home to one of the world's finest tree collections. Benefiting from its almost continental climate, trees from across the world, including Nepal and Chile, thrive here, many attaining champion status due to their remarkable size.

Enjoy scenic walks through the woodland as it transforms with the changing seasons. During autumn, deciduous maples, rowans and birches are the stars, providing a blaze of foliage colour across the garden. Then, once winter takes hold, visit again to marvel at the impressive structure and scale of the garden's many mighty conifers. The collection features a vast array of beautiful, unusual and treasured specimens that take centre stage during the colder months.
OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £10. Under-16s free. **rbge.org.uk/dawyck**

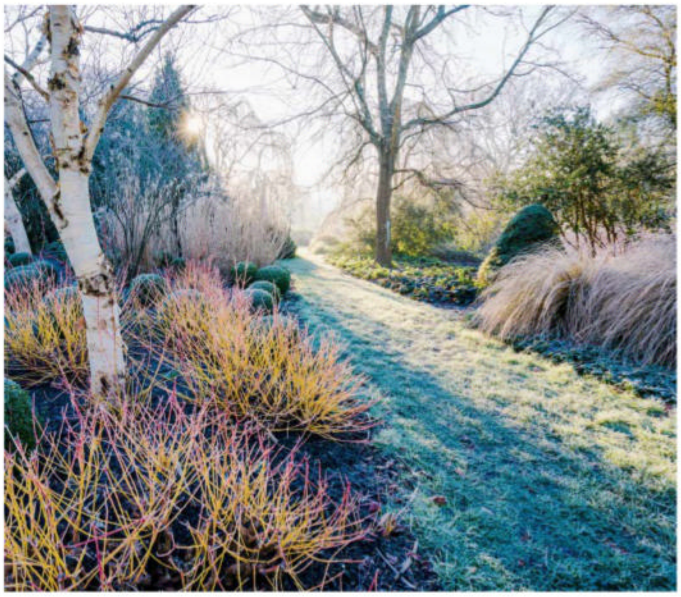
WINTER

All things bright and beautiful

SAVE £16.50

If ever you're in any doubt about the beauty of a garden in winter, there's no better place to visit than **Sir Harold Hillier Gardens** in Hampshire. Here, the four-acre winter garden demonstrates beautifully the plentiful colour and interest of the season. The skilful planting combinations brighten up even the dullest winter days. Swathes of cyclamen carpet the ground, textural tree bark comes to the fore, and the National Collection of witch hazel adds both rich fragrance and fiery colour.

Beyond the winter garden is the pinetum. Among its many prized specimens is *Picea abies* 'Viminalis', a champion tree whose curtain-like weeping branches form a useful shelter, should you need it, from any wintry weather.
OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £16.50. Offer valid from 1 November-31 March only. **hants.gov.uk/hilliergardens**



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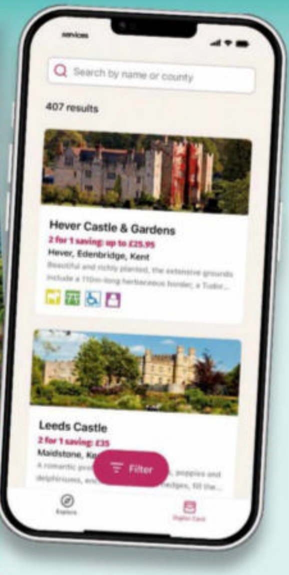

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Visiting alone? This year, 138 gardens offer discounted entry for solo visitors. Look for the purple symbol 👤 in your **2 for 1 Gardens** guide and in the app, or go to **Gardeners World.com/gardens**

Always check with gardens before you go, as some have restricted entry, close at short notice or require booking. To enjoy discounted entry, present your **2 for 1 Gardens** entry card on arrival. Find it on the inside coverflap of your guide – cut it out, sign it and enjoy unlimited use until **2 April 2026**. Alternatively, use the digital card, accessed by the app.* You can't share the card, so make sure you have a valid card for each pair of tickets. You can buy extra copies of the May issue at **Gardeners World.com/gardens**

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO BROWSE OUR ONLINE GUIDE

Before visiting any garden check its website for precise opening details

*YOU MAY USE THE 2 FOR 1 PRINTED CARD OR APP FOR ADMISSION ONLY ONCE PER GARDEN, PER DAY. YOU CANNOT USE THE PRINTED CARD AND DIGITAL CARD AT THE SAME VENUE ON THE SAME DAY.

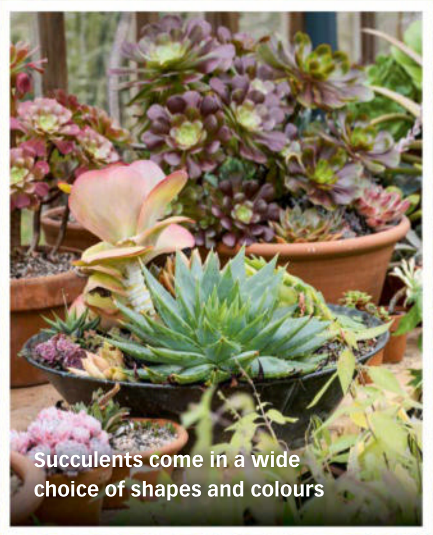
> “For dramatic effect, move tender succulents outdoors to a warm sheltered spot in the hotter months”

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

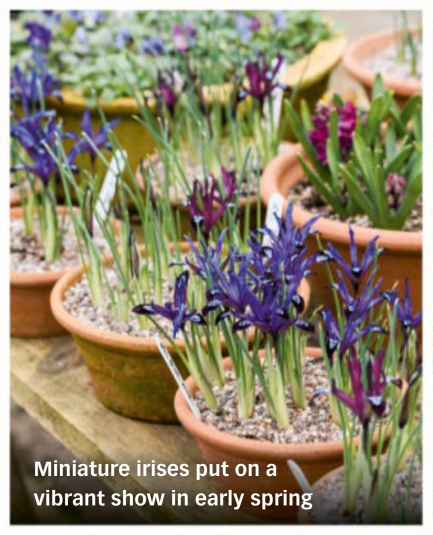
Some like it hot

Monty shares how he uses succulents, miniature bulbs and alpines at Longmeadow – planting them out in containers to bring a touch of the exotic to the garden

Tender succulents such as this *Aeonium* 'Zwartkop' can be planted in borders for the summer, but bring them back indoors in early autumn



Succulents come in a wide choice of shapes and colours



Miniature irises put on a vibrant show in early spring

The earliest months in my garden are brilliantly lit with colour. From the deep indigo, lapis, purple and yellow of *Iris reticulata*, *I. histrioides* and *I. danfordiae*, to the chocolate bells, flared with primrose yellow, of *Fritillaria michailovskyi*, nodding under the cover of the cool greenhouse, I enjoy these plants with a delight slightly tinged with regret that I have not always grown them with real purpose. Until about 10 years ago, I suppose I felt that they – among all the other gorgeous bulbs that we place into the 'alpine' category – were somehow not part of my horticultural vocabulary. I had not learned to appreciate them or the many others in this group of plants, from exquisite little bulbs and succulents to small shrubs.

Alpines have always had their own distinctive niche, but have never really entered the horticultural mainstream. This is a real pity, as alpines have a jewel-like quality and intensity quite unlike any other. Their nature also means that a garden of any size or situation can tap into their delights. For a long time I rather dismissed their attractions as an outdated fashion from the 1950s and 1960s. I thought I had outgrown them, which I now know is arrogant and rather stupid of me.

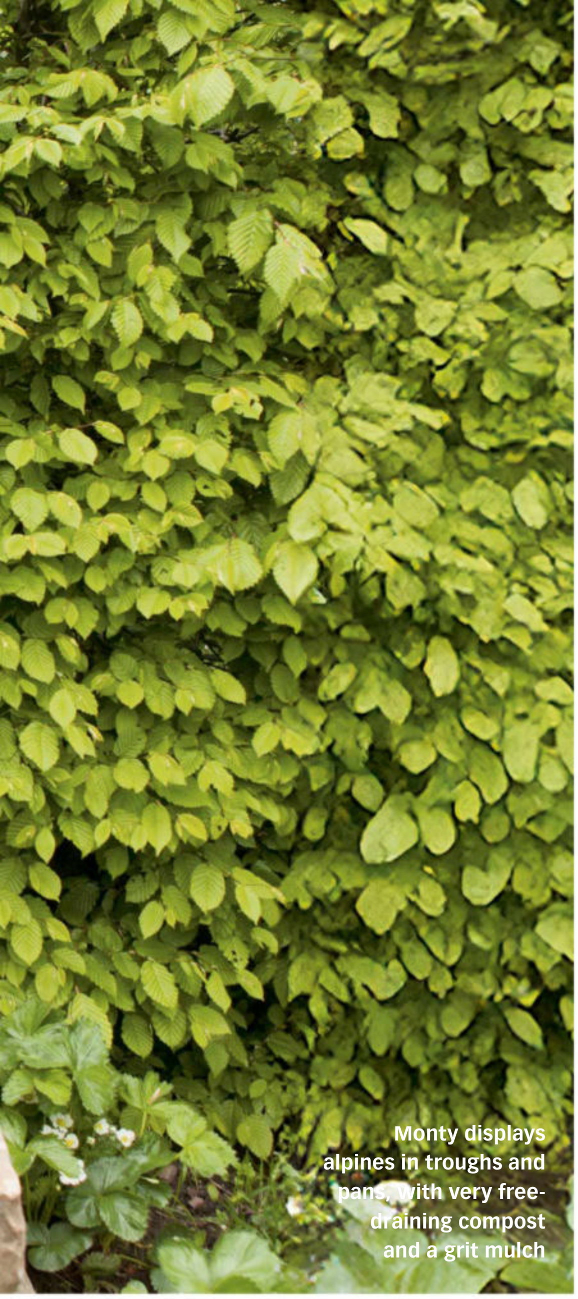
I suppose the real trigger for getting interested were my visits to the Tromsø Arctic-Alpine Botanical Garden in Norway, which is 350km inside the Arctic Circle, and the Drakensberg Mountains, half the world away in South Africa. These are two locations as disparate and different as might be imagined, save for the conditions – the Drackensbergs can actually be colder than the Gulf-Stream-warmed north of Norway – which for plants are remarkably similar. Both locations are cold, bright, well drained and intolerably harsh to a whole range of plants, meaning that those that have adapted, have done so with a specific set of features.

Most of the true alpines, which originated at high altitude, have evolved to cope with periods of intense winter cold, often with a covering of snow that acts as an insulating layer, followed by a wet, mild spring and a sunny, sometimes hot, dry summer. Few tolerate boggy conditions and most like very sharp drainage – they feel at home whether they find this combination of conditions in the Arctic Circle, Africa or the Andes.

Mini alpine landscapes

The vogue for rock gardens and alpine plants followed the uptake of mountaineering by the Victorian middle classes, who indulged their hobby at the nearest dramatic ranges – which happened to be the Alps. The botanists among these climbers noticed the plants there and started to collect them. Back home, wanting to show them off, they built mini-Alps in

> “Alpines have a jewel-like intensity, and a garden of any size can tap into their delights”



Monty displays alpines in troughs and pans, with very free-draining compost and a grit mulch

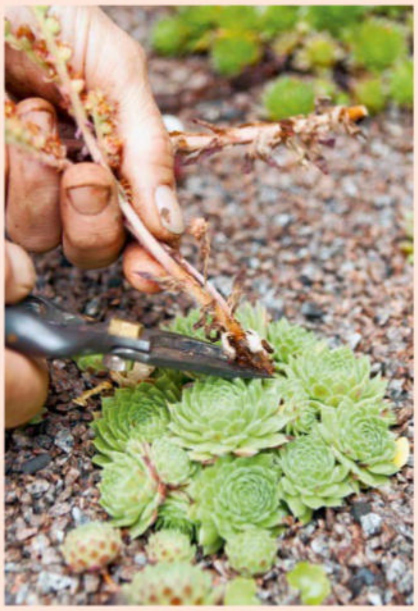
the back garden – in other words, rockeries. Some of these are extraordinary in scale and ambition, such as those at Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden and RHS Wisley, and the huge one (including a scale model of the Matterhorn) built by Sir Frank Crisp at Friar Park, Oxfordshire, which was bought and cared for by the late George Harrison – a very good gardener.

But you do not need a rock garden to grow and enjoy alpines. I like them in terracotta pans or pots, or stone troughs. Alpine pans are shallow terracotta pots and beautiful objects in their own right, and can look very good as a collection, each with its own individual planting. Troughs and sinks have the advantage over conventional pots of having a large surface area and a built-in drainage system via the plug hole. They also create the right kind of miniature landscape that brings out the best in many of the tiny, exquisite plants.

Whatever you use, it is a good idea to raise the container up closer to eye level. I often think that looking at alpines is like bending

Focus on succulent care

Succulents are a great choice for miniature rock gardens in containers and troughs. From May, once the risk of frost has passed, I put most of my succulents on display on the table outside the potting shed, through to the end of September. They like the open air and look terrific.



Cut off spent flower stems and faded leaves to keep succulents looking good

- **Display tender succulents** such as aeoniums inside for most of the year, then for dramatic effect move them outdoors to a warm sheltered spot in the hotter months – most need a minimum temperature of 5-10°C to thrive.
- **Add grit** to the potting compost when planting up containers of succulents and alpines, to improve drainage.
- **Cut off** any dead leaves. Also remove any faded flower stems on aeoniums before planting.
- **Use a sturdy** terracotta container when potting up aeoniums, as the shape of the plant can make it top-heavy. Half-fill the pot with peat-free cactus compost, then plant the aeonium with the stem at the same level in the compost as it was previously. Water well, then allow the compost to almost completely dry out before watering again.
- **Plant aeoniums** in borders too, for the summer, but give them plenty of space and plant them so the top of the rootball is just above the surface of the soil, to avoid waterlogged roots.
- **Bring tender succulents** back into the warm protection of the greenhouse by late September. This is not just to avoid frosts, which can damage or kill them, but also, just as importantly, to protect them from winter rain, which is so heavy here (and, with climate change, getting heavier). Succulents in general need little or no watering over the winter months. Much more damage can be done by too much water than too little. I only give them a drink if they are drooping visibly – and then just a little. In mid-spring, they can have a good deep drink, to recharge their cells with the water, which they can then draw on as they need it.

Keep tender succulents in a cool greenhouse over winter, with little or no watering

PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; JASON INGRAM

6 easy-to-grow alpines and succulents

Use these favourites to create colourful, drought-tolerant and low-maintenance container displays

- **Rhodohypoxis**

- **Aeonium**

- **Echeveria**

- ***Agave victoriae-reginae***

- **Miniature iris, such as 'J.S. Dijt'**

- **Saxifrage**

PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; TORIE CHUGG; JASON INGRAM

Keep alpines and succulents raised up from the ground, so you can look after them and admire them more easily

> “Once you have the alpine bug, it is hard to resist acquiring more pans, so they can be filled”

over to look at an exhibition of precious objects in a museum, so the containers act as display cabinets as much as a flower bed.

If you're very keen, you could create an alpine house – essentially an unheated greenhouse with a plunge bed to keep the roots cool and extreme ventilation, for although the plants need maximum sun and shelter from rain, they don't like heat.

I use pots that I overwinter in a glass coldframe – it has sides that open so the rain can be kept off while cold can get in. Then, as new growth appears, I start to bring them first into the greenhouse and then to stand on tables outside. The only problem with this outdoor exposure is that they can get terribly bashed by wind and rain, so quite often they all have to be shunted under cover. It's a palaver, but I enjoy it because it constitutes a kind of caring, nurturing gardening at a time of year when everything else is about preparation.

Caring for alpines

To ensure good drainage, it is best to use horticultural grit mixed with at least 50 per cent by volume of peat-free potting compost. For sinks and troughs, fill the bottom foot or so with hardcore, then mix the soil with grit. A good way of testing to see if the drainage is sharp enough is to make a heap of the soil mix, flattening the top and scooping out a hollow. Fill this with water. If the water immediately soaks into the pile, then the mix is correct. If it makes even the smallest puddle, then it needs more grit.

Once you have the alpine bug, it is hard to resist acquiring ever more pans, so they can be filled. I am no collector and not, in any real sense of the word, a plantsman. I love plants for their beauty rather than their rarity value, so am just as satisfied with a common saxifrage or a small sedum like 'Dragon's Blood', as I am with the distinctly tricky and unusual *Fritillaria minima*.

In fact, my tastes are even baser than that: I adore the large stone trough in the greenhouse yard filled with nothing more exotic than sempervivums, the common-or-garden houseleek, looking magnificent and one of the few rock plants that will grow in shade. The truth is that all alpines have a lightness of touch coupled with intensity that is unique, and by growing them you access a realm of pleasure that no other group of plants can provide. ☐

BBC Gardeners' World Live

GWL on 12-15 June

Monty is on stage at Gardeners' World Live at the NEC Birmingham on Thu, Fri and Sat (12, 13 & 14 June)

NEXT MONTH Monty shares how to keep your roses blooming through summer

advertisement feature

What a relief

Ensure your grill is the only thing feeling the burn this summer with help from Gaviscon Double Action

With the warmer weather finally here, now's the perfect time to get outside and fire up the barbecue. Of course, if you suffer from heartburn or indigestion, making the most of the seasonal fun isn't always easy – that's where Gaviscon Double Action can help.

Available in liquid, tablet and sachet form, Gaviscon Double Action offers dual relief. Not only does it neutralise excess stomach acid, but it also creates a protective barrier over the stomach contents, helping to prevent acid reflux (when acid escapes back up the oesophagus and causes heartburn).

Plus, it gets to work instantly and can last up to four hours, which is twice as long as other antacids*. So, whatever you're up to this summer, you can feel confident knowing Gaviscon Double Action will be there to help you enjoy more of the good times.

For more information on how Gaviscon Double Action can help you, visit **gaviscon.co.uk**

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*For verification, please email: verify.uk@reckitt.com. Gaviscon Double Action Mint Flavour Chewable Tablets/Oral Suspension for heartburn and indigestion. Always read the label. RT-M-VtxpqD

Seven symptoms to look out for

It's important to be able to recognise the symptoms of heartburn and indigestion, so you know how to relieve them effectively when they appear. Here are seven you should keep an eye out for:

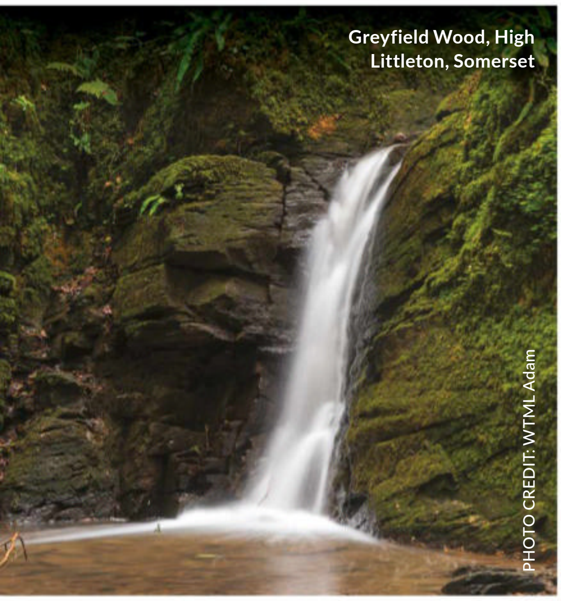
1 Stomach discomfort Indigestion is often caused by the acid in your stomach irritating the lining.
2 Stomach burning Irritation in the stomach area can also cause a burning sensation.
3 Acid reflux This is when stomach acid travels back up towards the throat, causing heartburn.
4 Chest burning One of the main symptoms of heartburn you may experience is a burning sensation in the middle of your chest.
5 Throat burning Acid can sometimes travel even higher, causing a burning feeling in your throat.
6 Bad breath Repeated episodes of acid reflux may make your breath smell, due to the stomach acid making its way back up.
7 Sour taste The stomach acid can leave an unpleasant sour taste in your mouth.

Go with the flow

Visit one of the Woodland Trust's magical waterfalls this spring to fully embrace all the drama of the season

Thornton Glen, Ingleton, North Yorkshire

PHOTO CREDIT: WTML/Jill Jennings



Greyfield Wood, High Littleton, Somerset

PHOTO CREDIT: WTML Adam

Whether you're marvelling at a vast river plunging ferociously down a rock face or a steady stream tumbling down a steep gorge, waterfalls are undoubtedly a natural sight to behold.

And as you watch the water drive its way through the landscape and listen to the sound as it builds from a gentle tinkle to an energetic burst, you can truly appreciate nature's power and its ability to clear your mind and energise your body.

Add to that all the awe-inspiring trees, plants and wildlife often found close by, too, and it doesn't get much better than a waterfall walk in a Woodland Trust wood. Of course, with so many charming cascades to discover, you might need a little inspiration when it comes to choosing which to visit first. Here are 10 of the best you can experience in the UK...

Coed Nant Gwernol and Coed Hendrewallog

Abergynolwyn, Gwynedd, Wales

As you wander through this stunning woodland, you'll find amazing views and diverse wildlife habitats. Saunter along the riverside footpath for a beautiful scenic walk that passes flowing streams, tumbling waterfalls and deep pools – and look out for the otters!

Twisleton and Thornton Glens

Ingleton, North Yorkshire

These two ancient woods are accessed via the popular Ingleton Waterfalls Walk. The four-mile trail follows the banks of the Rivers Twiss and Doe in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, where you'll take in seven stunning waterfalls. Thornton Force and Snow Falls are two standouts.

advertisement feature

Coed Nant Gwernol and Coed Hendrewallog, Abergynolwyn, Gwynedd, Wales

PHOTO CREDIT: WTML/ Jordan Mansfield

Get out into the woods

Every Woodland Trust member helps protect woods like these. You'll also receive a guide to **1,000 woods** to explore, all full of thrilling **wildlife**, stirring **scenery** and exciting **adventure**.

Burntollet Wood

East of Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Bordering the tranquil Ness Country Park, this maturing woodland in the Faughan Valley is home to Northern Ireland's highest waterfall, the Ness, which descends nine metres over three stages.

Coed Felenrhyd and Llennyrch

Maentwrog, Gwynedd, Wales

This rare temperate rainforest is surrounded by the Afon Prysor gorge waterfalls in Snowdonia National Park. Follow the waymarked loop to Rhaeadr Du (the Black Falls) where two thunder over 18 metres.

Uig Wood

Skye, Scotland

A fringe of trees along the shore of Uig Bay connects with two steep-sided ravine woodlands, which are characteristic of Scotland's rainforest. Find the Falls of Rha, a dramatic double waterfall on the River Rha, while the Rha Glen Ramble trail follows the ravine above the river and takes just 20 minutes to reach.

Greyfield Wood

High Littleton, Somerset

Several stream-side footpaths run through and around Greyfield Wood. Walk to just beyond the boundary to see a pretty waterfall that drops five metres over two ledges in the neighbouring woodland – plus, visit in spring and you'll be rewarded with a carpet of bluebells.

Plas Power Woods

Bersham, Clwyd, Wales

Explore diverse flora and fauna and a rich and intriguing history at one of the Woodland Trust's most popular Welsh woods. As you roam the waymarked trails at this remarkable site, you'll discover not one, but two waterfalls.

Waulkmill Wood

Bollington, Cheshire

The River Dean meanders along the wood's boundary before it pours over the edge of Clough Pool and runs away beneath a stone bridge, through the rocky gorge out into the valley. Keep an eye out for pretty spring flower displays, including bluebell and red campion, along the way.

Coed Felenrhyd and Llennyrch, Maentwrog, Gwynedd, Wales

PHOTO CREDIT: WTML/Ben Lee

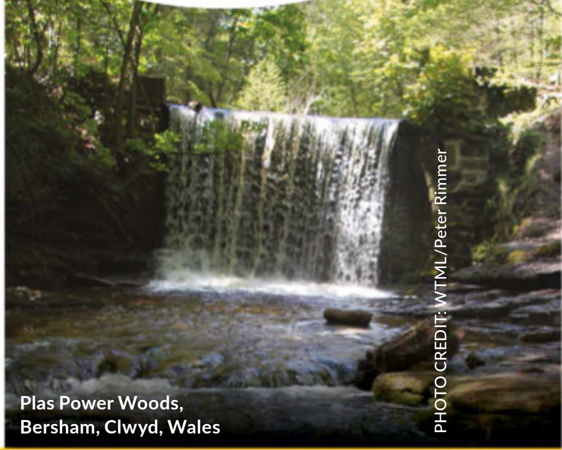

Plas Power Woods, Bersham, Clwyd, Wales

PHOTO CREDIT: WTML/Peter Rimmer

WOODLAND TRUST

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Creating happiness, for others as well as herself, is at the heart of Sue's gardening practice

Cultivating joy

Part 1 Bountiful borders

In a new three-part guide, Sue Kent shows how to create a low-maintenance, uplifting summer garden packed with colour, scent and joy. This month she focuses on a feel-good flower border

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

> “I regularly lose part of the day in contemplation, anticipating the beauty of buds to come”

Flower show season is upon us –a joyous time of the year – and with it the chance to gather inspiration and knowledge to inform our own garden design and plans. I love to visit the show gardens at events such as RHS Chelsea, Gardeners' World Live and Malvern, not only for the plants and flowers on display, but also to watch what people are drawn to and how long they linger. What brings them joy? Often, it's beautifully crafted borders full of flowers – a takeaway that I always try to replicate in my garden.

Stopping to observe and marvel at the sensory delights that a border can provide is one of gardening's greatest rewards. In my own garden, I regularly lose part of the day in contemplation, anticipating the beauty of buds yet to open, enjoying the scent or colour of flowers in full bloom, or simply observing fading petals or ripening fruits. This is all part of the process, and such a deep connection with nature is key to the pleasure and joy of creating a garden.

My garden is always evolving, and I have found ways to sustain the feel-good factor through changes and improvements, whether creating a new planting area from scratch, or rearranging and enhancing existing borders. But while I use many different planting styles, including block planting and areas of white space, densely packed, flower-filled borders are always on the menu.

This 'more is more' approach (more flowers = more joy) doesn't have to mean increased maintenance, though. By choosing a planting scheme that's manageable for you, those immersive borders will bring blooming joy for not only people but also wildlife.

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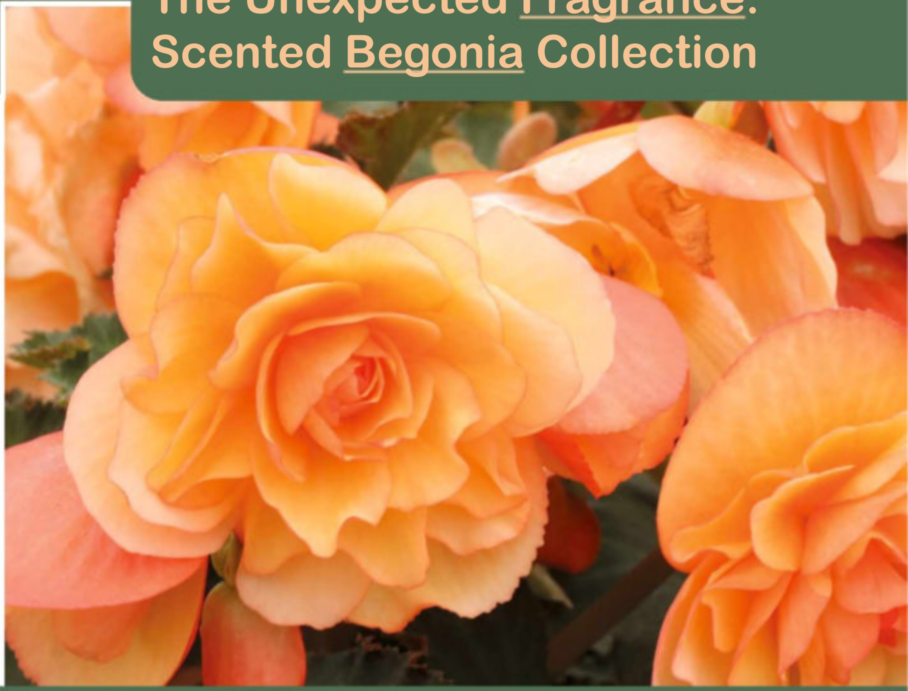

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TOP **Taking time to observe your garden is a crucial and pleasurable part of the gardening process**

BELOW **Sue created this red border for her husband**

We all manage gardening in our own way and while I love the physical tasks of gardening, it has to be easy. My emphasis is not on having a low-maintenance garden, but rather an easy-to-maintain planting scheme, which I've developed over years by devising a personal plant selection checklist, planting plan and plant-pimping regime to help extend the joy.

Pleasure guaranteed

Part of cultivating joy for me means ensuring that every plant has the chance to survive and thrive. If planning a new garden or border, a first assessment of elements such as soil structure, drainage, aspect and light availability over the four seasons of the year makes all the difference. Sometimes patience is required before making changes, with the right-plant-in-the-right-place approach helping to save money, time and effort in the long run.

With the foundations in place for a happy, healthy garden, it's then time for the real fun to begin – selecting plants! Too much choice can be overwhelming, so to make the process clearer still, I find a starting point to help bring focus to my research. For me, this is usually colour – a tried and tested way to bring calm, uplift or excite – whether that means a one-colour scheme, a riot of many, or a pared-down palette choice. I also use the shapes of flowers to help create atmosphere, with favourite forms including daisy, cup, spike, flat head and globe, while others prefer trumpets or plumes.

As a self-taught gardener, when working with plants that are new to me, research is key. A mood board is a good way to bring together ideas, for which I use a basic photo-editing, layout and design app. I also search

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gardening websites and social media to find images of specific plants grown within an existing scheme to help me understand how they will look within a community of other plants.

Once I've made a potential plant list, I get really nerdy and record them all, including my existing plants, on a month-by month spreadsheet, with columns for height, width, flower, colour, shape, flowering period and scent. I then analyse each month to check that there's enough variation of elements to create the display I'm looking for. This process highlights possible gaps in my design and provides a clear criterion for finding suitable plants to complete the picture.

Next is the pure joy of shopping for plants, which involves visiting nurseries and shows to see specimens in flower, and talking to specialists. This is all tremendously useful in terms of planning and avoiding expensive mistakes. If I've chosen a plant online, I like to see it in real life before purchasing.

Weaving things together

When it comes to the practical planting of a border, the first thing to do is to prepare the soil in late winter, removing all weeds and adding a layer of compost if it needs a boost. It's a good idea to measure the area of garden for planting and work out how many plants are required; for example, to achieve a freestyle, full and flowery border, where plants are planted individually with rhythm and repetition throughout (rather than in clumps), consider having around 20 plants per square metre, using a mix of perennials, bulbs, annuals and biennials.

The advantage of such dense planting is that there are no empty

TOP To ensure colour at specific times of the year, sketches and spreadsheets are useful at the planning stage

BELOW Pots are great for adding colour temporarily to borders that have finished flowering or are yet to bloom

Personal checklist

Take the hard work out of creating blooming borders and cultivate more joy by choosing easy-to-manage plants. For me, this includes the following checklist of questions, but you will likely want to devise your own list:

- ✓ Can this plant be maintained with small secateurs?
- ✓ Does each flower bloom for a long time, therefore reducing the need to deadhead?
- ✓ Will the stems and seedheads look good throughout winter?
- ✓ Is this plant kind to human skin when working with it?
- ✓ Does this plant need lifting or can it stay in the ground?
- ✓ Will the plants need staking or support?

When more is more

Cultivate even more joy by doing the tasks that bring you the greatest uplift. Some of my joyful go-tos include:

■ Propagating plants
I love propagating plants for beds and borders but also for the pleasure of watching something grow. Sowing from seed or bulbs and propagating from cuttings are all great ways to create new plants.

■ Happiness to share
Creating flower borders to my own design is always fulfilling but making one that I know will make someone else happy too is double the fun, such as a red border I made for my husband.

■ Joyful elements
This could include choosing plants such as lavender for scent or scabious for height and colour, but also focal points such as obelisks, ornaments or water features.

■ Feel-good jobs
Certain jobs such as tying in roses and deadheading can help focus the mind and draw attention to small details. Such mindful moments cultivate everyday satisfaction.

■ Time to relax
Gardening is not all about action, it's important to stop sometimes and just enjoy the blooms. I have seating areas around my garden that remind me to take time out.

■ Picking for pleasure
I love having fresh flowers in a vase indoors, drying them for winter and using them to inspire my artistic endeavours in my painting shed.

■ Celebrating nature
Cultivate joy by connecting with nature through supporting biodiversity and wildlife. A bird, bee or butterfly in my border never fails to bring a smile.

ABOVE Borders packed with flowers of all types are key to Sue's designs

BELOW Repetitive, almost meditative tasks, such as tying in climbers, can be hugely satisfying

areas of soil for weeds to get established and the plants support each other well – plus an emphasis on flowering plants will encourage lots of pollinating insects. The disadvantage, though, is that starting a new border can be prohibitively expensive, therefore, I try to grow some annuals and biennials from seed, such as wall flowers or foxgloves for spring, and cosmos or scabiosa to refresh the border in the second half of the year. This is a cost-effective way of filling space while the perennials establish and gives a cohesive look to a newly planted border.

Thinking ahead

Preplanning where the plants will go in the border is helpful. I do this by roughly plotting out each plant's location on graph paper, using coloured crayons to illustrate different types, and mixing plant sizes, flower shapes and colours to provide points of uplift and interest through the seasons. This is a helpful memory aide when it might not be possible to plant the whole area in one go.

To further assist the inevitable memory lapses, I use large plastic labels as markers outdoors for future planting, and sometimes dig a hole and put in an empty plant pot to keep the space free for a specific plant to go in later in the year. This can look odd but makes later planting easier for me and is less disruptive for the surrounding plants.

Using a spreadsheet and planting plan helps shepherd my thoughts, but when my toes are in the soil and I'm surrounded by living plants I don't always stick to the plan. Intuition and experimentation are a huge part of the joy of creating a garden, so remember to factor those elements in, too! ❐

BBC Gardeners' World Events
■ **Gardeners' World Live** (12-15 June)
Sue Kent will appear on 14 June

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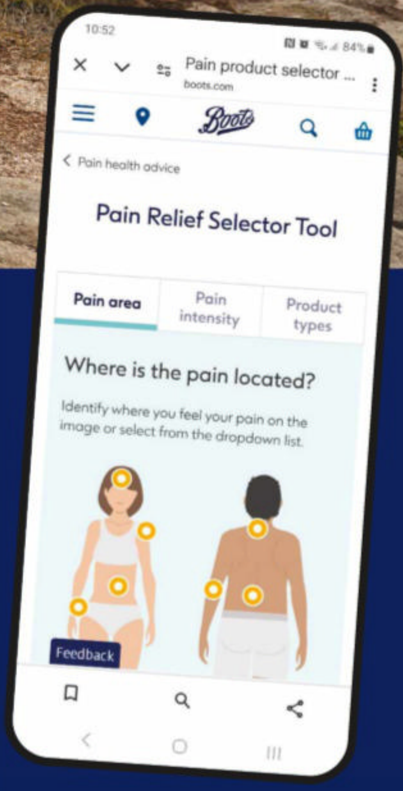

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Combine tagetes into your food growing area to deter pests from your crops

Master your mix

Nick's guide to edible companion planting

Good plant combinations can help edible plants to crop better and avoid pest infestations. **Nick Bailey** shows how to get it right

PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

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Much mythology surrounds the idea of vegetable companion planting, and there is a lot of dubious anecdotal advice out there. However, there are certain sets of edibles that definitely do grow better together. And this companion growing can have numerous benefits including deterring pests, growing sacrificial plants to deflect pests from others, drawing in pollinators, enriching the soil or creating masking scents to hide a crop from pests.

Better together

Perhaps the most important aspect of edible companion growing is the concept of creating plant communities and avoiding monocultures. Big Agriculture relies on vast monocultures stretching to hundreds of hectares, but growing just one species *en masse* like this has many disadvantages. If a pest or disease strikes it can tear though a crop of the same plant at great speed. Growing communities of plants, as we find in nature, creates a natural balance of plant, pest and disease. And all of this leads to a healthier, more productive plot that is part of the wider ecology of the garden and its surrounding landscape. This idea isn't some newfangled notion – it stretches back to ancient civilisations such as the Aztecs, and frankly it just makes sense.

Masking scents

The king of companion planting for edibles surely has to be growing tagetes alongside tomatoes. It has long been believed that the tagetes scent puts off would-be attackers of the tomatoes, and research has shown this to hold true. Limonene, a chemical substance found in tagetes, is responsible. Other research has shown that growing any number of different flowering plants around tomatoes has benefits, too. This is likely down to introducing sacrificial species (which are more favoured by pests than the tomatoes) and drawing in predators of attacking pests. Pairing strongly scented edibles can also help each member of the partnership; carrots and onions grown in close proximity mask each other's scent, so pests can't find them.

When I mention sacrificial plants I'm not talking about hauling a hispi cabbage up a mountain for some sap-letting! Sacrificial plants are those grown in association with an edible plant in order that the pest is drawn to the sacrificial species instead of the crop. One example of this is nasturtiums grown in close association with brassicas. The nasturtiums are more appealing to pests than your brassicas are, and also form a useful moisture-retaining ground cover.

Companion planting can also be a key component of basic crop rotation. In other words, growing a crop one year ahead of another in order to prepare the soil for the second crop. The most obvious example of this is growing peas or beans in an area in year one in order for them to lock in nitrogen to feed the crop of brassicas you intend to plant there in year two. And growing any green manure around the base of another crop as a companion has the benefit of not only adding nutrition to the soil once hoed off and left to die in situ but also providing a moisture-retaining seal on the soil surface.

Safe smells Carrots and onions protect each other against pests with their aromas

Red clover

Tag team Nasturtiums draw brassica pests away from crops, and tagetes ward off whitefly

Tomatoes and tagetes

Hide and seek Close, varied interplanting makes it hard for pests to find their favourite plants

Mangetout peas

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

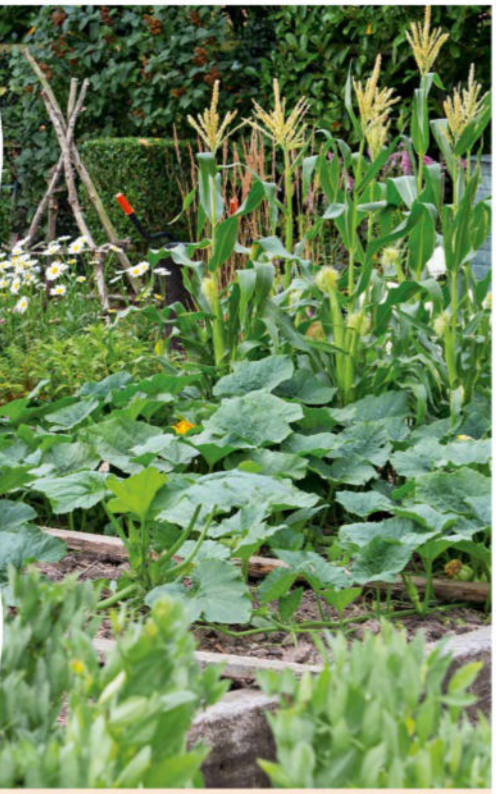
Many ornamental species can be added to the veg plot as useful companions. Growing alyssum with lettuce, for example, sees the alyssum draw in the natural enemies of the pests that attack the lettuce, thus protecting it. Long-flowering species such as calendula are used for this purpose, too. And any species with flat heads composed of small flowers such a fennel, dill and achillea are a massive draw for parasitic wasps, which wipe out aphids.

Shoulder to shoulder

Mixing together the right edible crops can also provide support and shelter. Lettuce can scorch in direct sunlight but thrives planted in the dappled shade at the base of sweetcorn. And sweetcorn is one of 'Three Sisters', grown together for support and protection in ancient Central America. The technique sees climbing beans, squash and sweetcorn grown together. The bean locks nitrogen into the soil. The sweetcorn in turn flourishes, providing canes for the beans to climb, while the squash cloaks the ground, cooling the soil and preventing moisture loss. Everyone's a winner! The more modern idea of forest gardening borrows from this principle and extends it to a range of perennial, woody, vegetable and fruiting plants, all grown beneath a light woodland canopy. ☐

Fennel

Mint



Magic number Sweetcorn, squash and beans offer each other benefits as members of the 'Three Sisters'

Reliable vegetable companions

There's a lot of misinformation out there regarding companion planting, much of it based on anecdotal evidence with scant scientific backing. But there are several tried and tested companions backed by science that truly work.

■ Tomatoes and tagetes

Growing tagetes at the base of tomatoes not only deters pests due to the compound limonene, which the plant exudes, but also supresses a harmful type of nematode.

■ Onions and carrots

This is one of the most reliable pairings in terms of deterring pests. Both carrots and onions emit a strong odour which is capable of masking the scent of the other plant, thus preventing their relative pests from finding and attacking them. It's an easy association which reliably works.

■ Red clover and... any edible!

The nitrogen-fixing capacity of red clover makes it an ideal understorey crop to grow beneath tall crops from kale to sweetcorn. Its foliage cloaks the soil, reducing water loss while its nitrogen-fixing nodules prepare the soil for a hungry future crop. It also has the benefit of drawing in endless pollinators and useful pest predators.

■ Beans and sweetcorn

These two plants form a symbiotic relationship, with the beans providing nutrition to the soil by fixing nitrogen, while the corn provides sturdy canes on which the beans can climb.

■ Calendula and courgettes

Courgettes may struggle to attract pollinators in the numbers that they need them. This can be redressed and pollinators hailed by planting calendula between the courgettes. Other long-flowering annuals can work here, too.

■ Cabbage and mint or *Salvia officinalis*

The extremely strongly scented foliage of both sage and mint confuses and deters the litany of pests that want a piece of your brassicas, particularly flea beetle, which can totally decimate crops in a matter of days.

Mixing edibles and ornamentals has several benefits and helps to make a veg patch look great

BBC Gardeners' World Events

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Nick appears every day.

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

NEXT MONTH Nick shows how climbers can grow together to provide year-round interest

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The winning formula

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As the weather finally turns, it's time for your outdoor space to become the hub of your home again – think ball games, barbecues and, hopefully, plenty of basking in the sun. And naturally, you'll want to enjoy all that with your friends and family, so your garden will need to be firing on all cylinders for the season ahead.

That's where Einhell, Germany's number one cordless garden power tool brand, can help. Einhell is more than up to the job, because when you use one of its cordless tools, you're benefitting from the same technology used to cool tyres by the Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS Formula One Team pit crew. After all, as leading driver George Russell demonstrates opposite, precision and power aren't just for the track.

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Einhell tip: *Keep your grass at least 5cm tall to help it retain enough moisture in hot weather.*

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Einhell tip: *Use the trimmer's front guard to protect flowers and help its spool last longer.*

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Keeping hedges neat and healthy is simple with Einhell's hedge trimmers, thanks to long, laser-cut, diamond-ground blades for precision cutting. The handle rotates for comfortable trimming at any angle, and because it's cordless, you have total freedom to roam. **Model pictured:** Cordless Hedge Trimmer (GE-CH 18/60 Li-Solo).

Einhell tip: *Lay a tarpaulin down for an easy clean up and always check for nesting birds before cutting.*

4. Power through clean-ups

Clear grass clippings, hedge cuttings and leaves in seconds with Einhell's leaf blowers. The variable speed lets you control air flow, plus you can adjust the blower's length for precision cleaning. **Model pictured:** Cordless Leaf Blower (GP-LB 36/210 Li E-Solo).

Einhell tip: *Use Eco mode to extend battery life, or Turbo Boost mode for stubborn debris.*

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Beyond the herb bed

Grow and enjoy more herbs in your garden by interplanting them in beds, borders, pots, and the veg patch. **Adam Frost** shares how he mixes things up

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

Adam grows a wide variety of herbs in borders, pots and between vegetables

> “It was Geoff Hamilton who got me into interplanting **herbs** across the garden”

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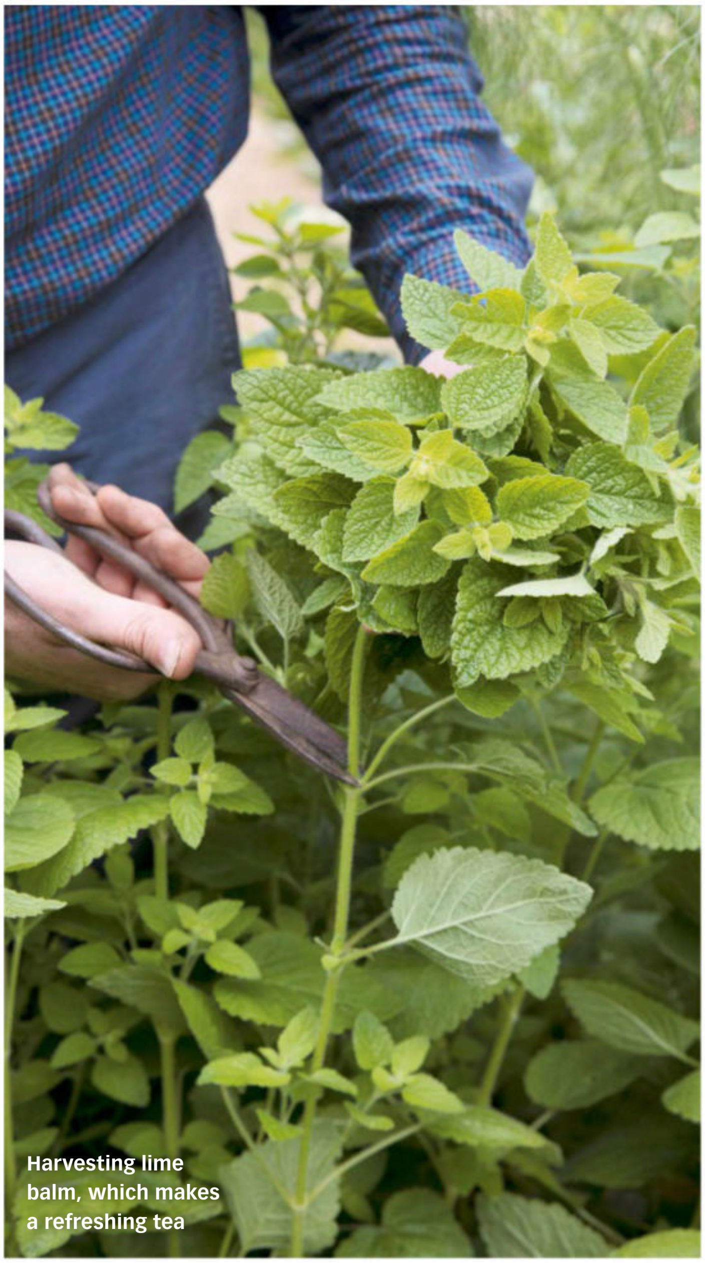

Harvesting lime balm, which makes a refreshing tea

Harvesting oregano and chard from the vegetable beds

Adam cuts sweet lemon mint, one of several mints he grows in pots

Herbs are such brilliant plants and even a very simple meal with a fresh scattering of them becomes elevated for me! They are the magic when it comes to adding flavour to food and drinks, plus while growing, they also attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies, which is great for the overall health of our gardens. But it was Geoff Hamilton who got me onto the idea of interplanting herbs across the garden, some ideal for sun, others for shade – a herb for every location as it were. With a choice of shapes, forms, flowers and uses there's something for everyone. From the ornamental border to the veg patch or in pots, they really do work in so many settings. Weaving them through your garden is a great way to combine functionality with beauty.

I have had a fascination with growing herbs from being a kid really. I think my first memory is the smell of lemon balm that Scruffy Nan (as I called her) had let seed all over her garden. As youngsters my cousins and I would come back in the house at the end of the day, lemon scented! It blew my mind as to how it looked nothing like a lemon, but that smell was amazing. Fast forward to when I'm 16 years old and get my first bedsit. I stocked my windowsill with parsley, sage, thyme and rosemary, which felt very exotic at the time. Today it's common to use these herbs in our kitchens, fresh, dry or preserved.

I also grew up watching my uncle, who was a chef, and those memories stay with you. As my gardens grew so did my herb collections, but in all honesty, I would normally keep them in groups. It was probably Geoff Hamilton that started me looking at herbs in a different way and not focusing so much just on the function of these plants but the beauty, too.

Once, when we built a cottage garden, Geoff asked me to create a 'thyme' table, which was a simple, open timber box with four legs, filled with gritty compost and then planted with this wonderful aromatic plant. The thyme covered the whole surface apart from two pieces of flat stone as place settings. It was a joy and as you sat with a cup of tea at the table, your hands were drawn to the thyme which was incredibly tactile. It really made you very aware of your senses, a simple idea but really effective.

As we created that garden, Geoff would explain how scented herbs would pull in bees and butterflies and I have experimented with interplanting herbs across the garden ever since.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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A layered approach

My front garden is south facing and has been designed as an ornamental kitchen garden, which has been created in layers with fruit trees, soft fruits, herbs, and cut flowers including bulbs, leaving areas within the borders for annual veg.

Approaching the house, one mixed border is backed with fanned fruit trees, the lower layers brimming with herbs such as agastache, lime balm, rosemary, fennel, tarragon and chives, interplanted with cut or edible flowers such as dianthus, nasturtiums, dahlias, roses, peonies and achillea.

I let slender borage seed freely along the border and into the gravel path, which along with a planting of thyme helps create a lovely effect, and being located just a short walk from the front door, it's also easy to pop out and pick a few bits of these herbs for tea, cooking, or just to brighten up the house.

Across the garden, I've got all the classic herbs, such as rosemary, thyme, oregano and sage, which are all planted along well-walked routes or next to a seat, so the engagement is daily. The power of perfume in the garden can be amazing at times and so five minutes sitting outside near the rosemary, a cup of tea in hand, is how I'll often start the day. A cup of freshly cut lime-balm tea, even better.

Pretty and productive

As well as having the mixed border, I also plant perennials and vegetables among my herbs. The idea of the ornamental kitchen garden has always fascinated me, and even back when I was working with the late Geoff Hamilton, I remember wondering what planting ornamentals and veggies together was all about. Then I learned that this method of gardening dates back to Medieval times and that it's possible to make a vegetable garden work aesthetically as well as providing food for the house.

My veg garden now carries plants such as Scots lovage, a beautiful strong fleshy plant that grows to heights of 50cm, with a flavour that's similar to celery or parsley. It is great as an ornamental but can also be used in all sorts of cooking. Silver-shield French sorrel is also allowed to scramble about, not only adding aesthetic appeal, but carrying a real citrus punch, great in salads and fish.

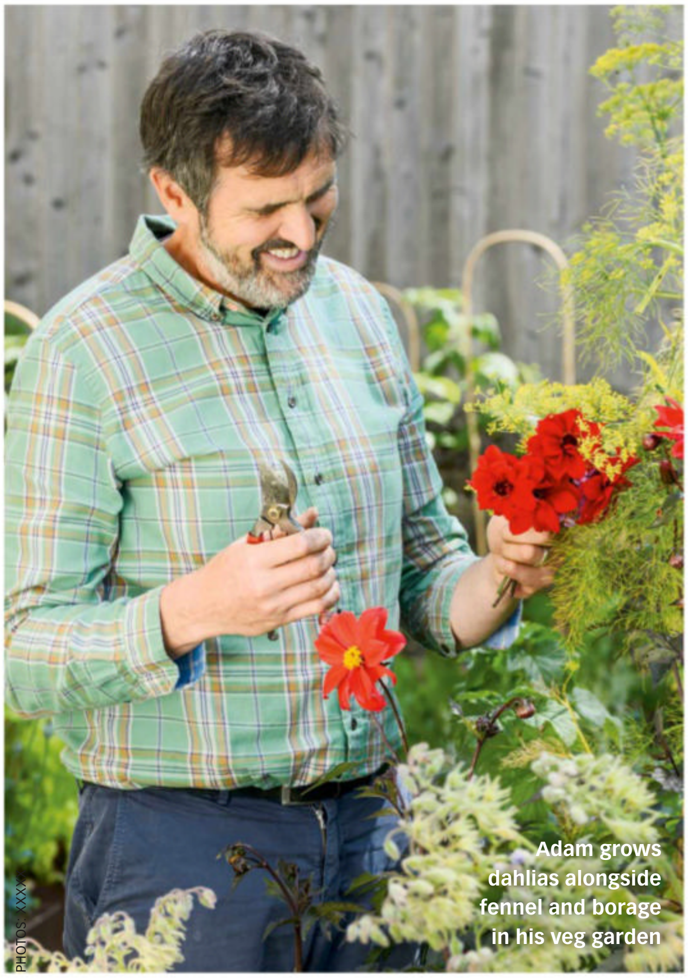
Popping up through the planting are fennel and agastache, which also work well with monarda, holding throughout the winter, and complementing oregano, bergamot and borage in flower. As herb flowers are attractive to pollinators, this also helps the development of nearby fruit and vegetables, too. On top of that, growing herbs and veggies together can mean that if some of the veg gets a bit leggy or falls over through the season, there's something to lean against to support them. This feels so much more natural than having canes all over the place.

Free to roam or potted up

Up at the top end of the garden, through my gravel area, the grey leaved plants such sage and oregano are an ideal fit. I use prostrate thyme as ground cover and

Decorate your table with vases of freshly picked, scented herbs

Attract pollinators to crops with nearby flowers


PHOTOS: XXX

Adam grows dahlias alongside fennel and borage in his veg garden

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

> “Across the garden, I've got all the classic herbs, planted along well walked routes or next to a seat, so the engagement is daily.”

Favourite herbs to mix and match

Wondering which herbs to interplant in your garden and where? These are some of my favourites – along with their ultimate height and ideal positioning. Simply choose a spot where they grow best in terms of sun or shade, whether that's in your veg patch, ornamental border or pots, and see how they fare. You can always move them around until you find the perfect spot.

Korean mint (*Agastache rugosa* f. *albiflora*)
Height x Spread 1.2m x 50cm
Full sun and well-drained soil

Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*)
H x S 35cm x 20cm
Prefers full sun and moist but well-drained soil.

Lemon verbena (*Aloysia citriodora*)
H x S 2.5m x 2.5m
Plant in full sun and well-drained soil.

Slender borage (*Borago pygmaea*)
Height 30cm x 45cm
Plant in full sun or partial shade, in moist but well-drained soil.

***Melissa officinalis* 'Lime Balm'**
H x S 1m x 45cm
Prefers full sun to partial shade and moist but well-drained soil.

Blackcurrant mint (*Mentha* 'Blackcurrant')
H x S 50cm x 50cm
Prefers full sun or partial shade in moist but well-drained soil.

Sweet cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*)
H x S 1.2m x 75cm
Thrives in partial shade and moist but well-drained soil.

Scots lovage (*Ligustrum scoticum*)
H x S 60cm x 40cm
Prefers full sun and well-drained soil.

Buckler-leaf sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*)
H x S 45cm x 60cm
Prefers full sun or partial shade and moist but well-drained soil.

Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus* 'Green Ginger')
H x S 1m x 1m
Grow in full sun and unenriched, well-drained soil.

Homegrown herbs such as sweet lemon mint (above) make a refreshing tea

> *"Containers are a great starting point for family favourites such as parsley and basil"*

enjoy the lemon scent of my childhood from catmint, while my feline friend Ash prefers a soft mint. If you have dry conditions in your garden, plants such as rosemary and lavender can make great low hedges to break up space.

Herbs also occupy the shadier spots in the garden from sweet woodruff and red veined sorrel to sweet cicely and angelica, seeding around or covering ground. Planting wild garlic under the hedge in more contained spots stops it spreading too much but provides just enough of a crop to make pesto.

I've also got herbs in containers, ideal for restraining the mints that can take hold and get carried away, or lemon verbena, society garlic, or Szechuan pepper that need transporting into a more protected spot during winter. Containers are also a great starting point for family favourites such as parsley, coriander and basil, which are delicious chopped over fish or pasta, topping a Thai curry, or used in homemade pesto. Grow these herbs near your back door or kitchen to make it quick and easy to harvest.

It's not just the usual varieties though, I'm experimenting and interweaving diffferent cultivars through the garden all the time. It's just about having a bit of fun trying them out and mixing and matching stuff – some will work, and some may not but that's all part of the enjoyment. ❐

PHOTOS: ALAMY/PIEMAGES-NATURE, PATSY DAVIES, MARTIN HUGHES-JONES; SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

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Blooming lovely

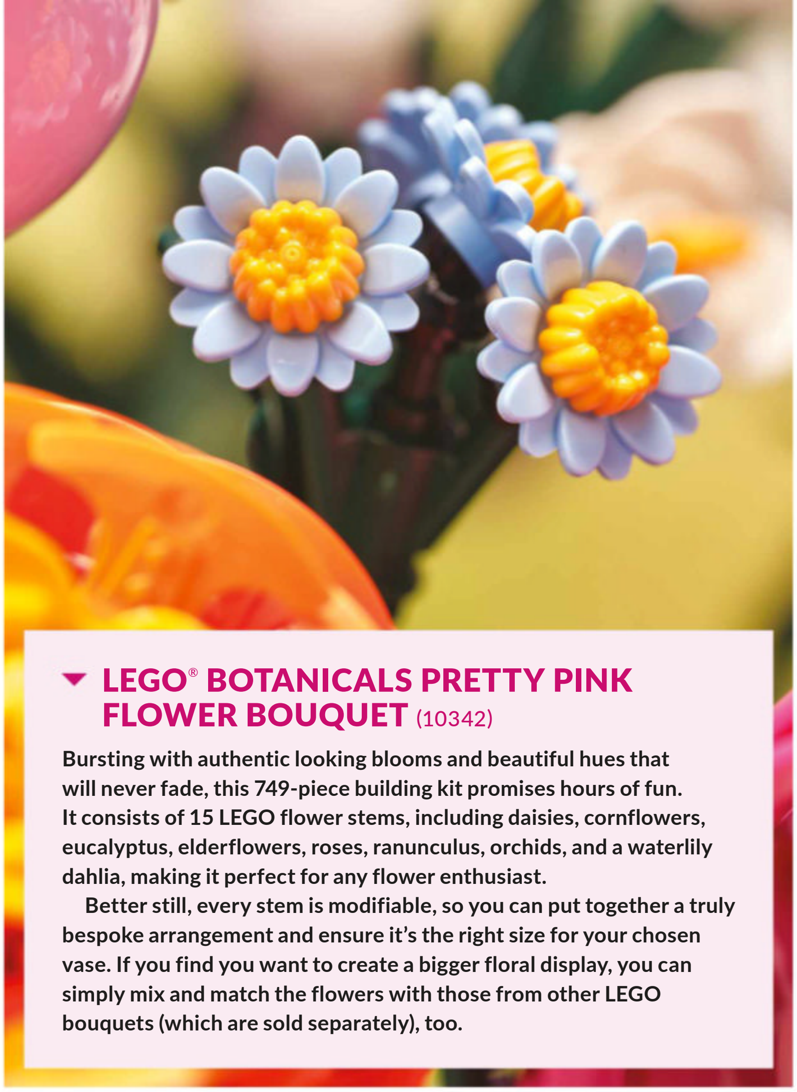
Enjoy a nature-inspired project? Relax and unwind with the LEGO® Botanical Collection

Gardening gives you the perfect opportunity to admire nature's beauty, but it's likely all the patience, effort and reward that comes with the pastime that makes it so special to you. Building LEGO sets certainly has that in common, and if you're all about cultivating calm, then you're sure to love the LEGO Botanical Collection.

Available in a bouquet or by the stem, LEGO Botanicals allow you to truly let your creativity blossom. Each detailed set mimics the vibrant colours and varied shapes of real-life flowers, and is designed with many thoughtful details, such as adjustable stems, leaves and petals. With the Botanical Collection you can create lasting floral displays that won't wilt, all while engaging in a peaceful, hands-on activity.

Plus, because you won't be inhibited by the weather or the seasons, you'll have the freedom to experiment with different flower designs and channel your inner florist whenever the mood takes you throughout the year.

So, what are you waiting for? From bountiful bouquets to spectacular succulents, here are just some of the sets you could get building right now...



▼ LEGO® BOTANICALS PRETTY PINK FLOWER BOUQUET (10342)

Bursting with authentic looking blooms and beautiful hues that will never fade, this 749-piece building kit promises hours of fun. It consists of 15 LEGO flower stems, including daisies, cornflowers, eucalyptus, elderflowers, roses, ranunculus, orchids, and a waterlily dahlia, making it perfect for any flower enthusiast.

Better still, every stem is modifiable, so you can put together a truly bespoke arrangement and ensure it's the right size for your chosen vase. If you find you want to create a bigger floral display, you can simply mix and match the flowers with those from other LEGO bouquets (which are sold separately), too.

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To find out more about the LEGO Botanicals range, visit **lego.com**

▲ LEGO® BOTANICALS TINY PLANTS (10329)

Featuring nine plants – a mix of arid, tropical and carnivorous species – this 758-piece set will fill your home with joy. It includes rainforest gems like the jade plant, false shamrock and laceleaf, along with the Venus flytrap, red sundew and the pitcher plant, which are renowned for luring and trapping their pray.

Each variety also comes with a plant pot, so you can arrange them together or separately. This set is suitable for both new and advanced builders, as it includes different models for easy, medium and advanced-level building complexity.

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Make a Metre Matter

Create a wildlife pond

There's nothing better than a wildlife pond for providing a fantastic habitat for nature in your garden – even a small one will help a host of birds, amphibians and mammals like hedgehogs and bats. Digging a pond the size of a square metre can be completed in a weekend, or you can make one from an old sink or even a deep plastic trug.

Fill your pond with native aquatic plants to offer places for creatures to lay eggs, find shade and hide from predators. And, once your local wildlife finds the water, you'll be able to sit nearby and enjoy watching all of them in action.

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ILLUSTRATION: GETTY PHOTO: PAUL DEBOIS

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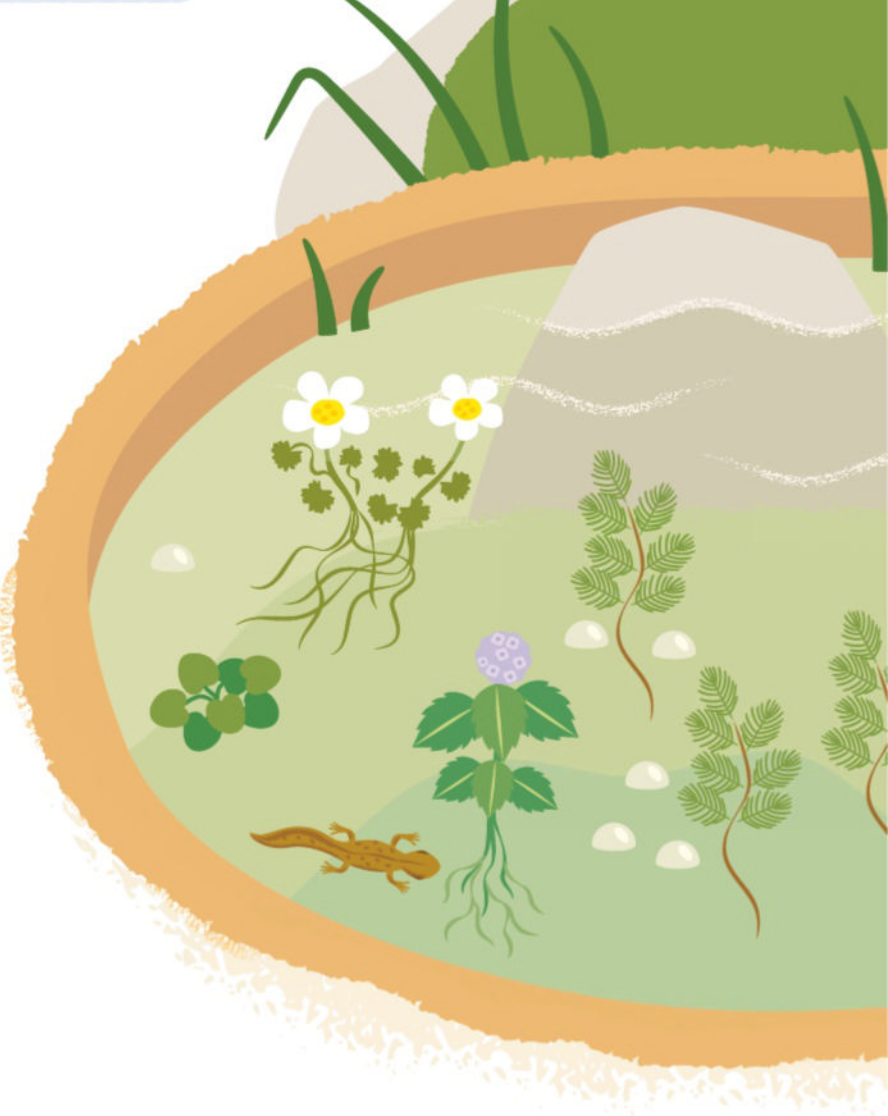
Elements of your pond

Even the smallest pond will attract wildlife. **Nic Wilson** shares her top tips on how to build and maintain it so you have creatures visiting for years on end

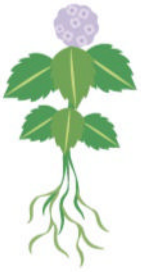
▶ ASPECT

Situate your wildlife pond in a warm, sunny spot, preferably one that gets shade for part of the day to reduce algal growth and accommodate any pond life that prefers cooler conditions.



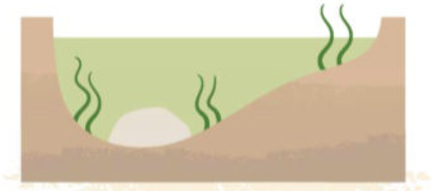
▲ SAFETY

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents advises parents of children under the age of six to avoid having ponds in their gardens. If you decide to have a pond, it should be fenced off or covered with a childproof grating above the water (while making sure wildlife can still get in and out). Young children should always be supervised by an adult, even if ponds have safety features. Visit **rospa.com** for more information.



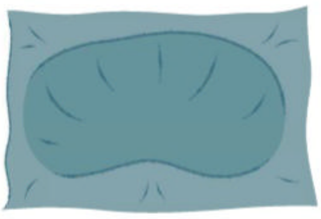
◀ MARGINAL PLANTS

Healthy pond ecosystems need a mix of aquatic plant species including marginal, floating and oxygenating plants. Marginals such as brooklime, marsh marigold and water mint provide cover for wildlife, places for newts to lay their eggs and nectar-rich flowers to attract pollinators.



▲ DEPTH

A small wildlife pond need only have a maximum depth of 30cm, although 45-60cm graduating to shallower areas around the edge is better. If you have a preformed pond with steeper sides, you'll need to add a ramp or another way for animals to get out safely.



◀ LINER

Digging a hole and adding a flexible liner allows you to create a natural shape with varying water levels. Ideally, a wildlife pond should have shallow margins to allow wildlife easy access and deeper areas towards the centre. Once your pond is lined, fill it with rainwater.

ILLUSTRATIONS: IAN CUNLIFFE

▼ CONTAINER POND

If digging a hole is impractical, why not opt for a container pond? Choose any durable watertight container, from a porcelain sink (with the hole plugged and sealed) to a deep plastic trug, and ensure that wildlife has a way to get out safely. Fill it with rainwater and add two or three smaller aquatic plants such as flowering rush, frogbit or water forget-me-not.

▲ MAINTENANCE

Leave your wildlife pond alone as much as possible. If you need to clear out leaves, divide plants or cut back vegetation, wait until late autumn or early winter when there are fewer creatures in the pond. Before composting plant material, gently swill it in a bucket of rainwater and then return any wildlife to the pond.

▲ FLOATING PLANTS

Frogbit is an ideal plant for a wildlife pond. Its floating leaves provide shelter for creatures below the water and landing pads for visiting insects such as hoverflies. Common water crowfoot produces white buttercup-like flowers that attract pollinators, lobed leaves that float and submerged spiked foliage that helps oxygenate the water.

▶ OXYGENATING PLANTS

These important plants generally have submerged leaves that help keep the water clear, while the oxygen they release enables aquatic wildlife to thrive. They also create superb underwater habitats for pond creatures. Rigid hornwort, common water starwort and upright water milfoil are all good oxygenators.

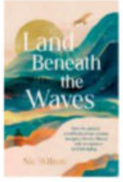
▲ WATERSIDE HABITATS

Create additional habitats around your pond with wildflower planting, areas of long grass, and rock or log piles to give visiting wildlife – such as frogs, birds and newts – protection from predators.

Dos & don'ts

- ✓ Do aim to cover around two thirds of the pond's surface with plants to help prevent a buildup of algae and provide shelter for aquatic life
- ✓ Do stick to native plants in your wildlife pond to reduce the likelihood of invasive non-native species becoming established in the wild
- ✓ Do make sure you buy pond plants in peat-free compost from reputable nurseries
- ✓ Do collect rainwater so you don't have to use tap water if you decide to top up the pond during the summer
- ✓ Do add a branch that overhangs the water as a perch for dragonflies
- ✓ Do plan the most important feature – a viewing spot, where you can sit and enjoy watching the wildlife that visits your pond

- ✗ Don't situate your pond under deciduous trees as falling autumn leaves can cause nutrients to build up in the water
- ✗ Don't add fish to a wildlife pond as they are likely to eat aquatic plants and animals
- ✗ Don't feel you have to top up ponds in the summer unless they are in danger of completely drying out – some wildlife benefits from lower water levels
- ✗ Don't introduce wildlife such as frogspawn from other ponds as there's a risk of spreading disease



■ **Nic Wilson**'s book *Land Beneath the Waves* (Octopus Publishing Group, £18.99) will be published on 12 June 2025.

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‘Which garden design trends are here to stay, and which are passing fads?’

Pollyanna Wilkinson is a multi-award-winning garden designer, author of the bestselling *How to Design a Garden* (DK, £22) and co-host of The Ins & Outs podcast

Every year as the weather improves, the same question comes up: “What are the latest garden design trends?” And every year, my reaction is the same – I climb up on my high horse and declare that we shouldn’t really be following ‘trends’ in our gardens, as that my friends is the path (pardon the pun) to a very dated garden in a few years’ time

But with the best will in the world, even if we manage to resist faddy aesthetics, even our beloved, and arguably more timeless, plants aren’t immune to falling out of fashion, so let’s look at what to embrace and what to leave behind this year…

We need only look to the conifer craze of the 1970s to see how certain plants can swiftly fall in or out of favour. But they can also make a triumphant comeback. Take dahlias, for example – not long ago they were seen as deeply uncool, relegated to granny’s garden. Now? Show me an influencer not posing among them come summer. And the same is happening with the glorious gladioli, once dismissed, they are now very much on the rise. I am an enormous fan of the moody *Gladiolus* ‘Espresso’, a dark crimson confection which brings drama to the late summer border, and the classic *Gladiolus* × *byzantinus* – with its pop of shocking pink. Not only do gladioli bring brilliant late summer colour at a time when the border can be getting tired, they make a wonderful cut flower, too – I suggest you plant them in abundance.

One positive shift, rather than a trend, which I advocate you jumping on the proverbial bandwagon of, is embracing gardens that are more resilient, biodiverse, and climate conscious. The use of recycled materials and aggregates in hardscaping is becoming the norm and planting palettes are shifting towards species that thrive with minimal intervention. In particular, gravel gardens, once a niche concept, are now a go-to for low (ish) maintenance and resilient planting. Think Beth Chatto’s famous Gravel Garden, and the fabulous Knepp Estate in Sussex, planted on sand, gravel and rubble.

I’m not sure cut flowers have ever not been in fashion, but they are now high up the wish list for many, and paired with that comes the rise of the edimental. Plants like globe artichokes, asparagus, and the increasingly popular honeyberry, not only provide annual yields with minimal maintenance, but also enhance the garden’s aesthetic appeal. This fusion of form and function aligns beautifully with sustainable gardening practices.

There is, mercifully, a shift away from the desire for the perfect, polished, and dare I say sterile garden, packed with swathes of paving and lawn, towards a wilder, more relaxed and informal style of garden. Pollinator friendly, naturalistic, and (hurrah!) abundant, planting is increasing in popularity, and with this shift we now see the happy result that our gardens are becoming more wildlife friendly. Which brings me on to which gardening trends to avoid…

> *“One positive shift, rather than a trend… is embracing gardens that are more resilient, biodiverse and climate conscious”*

I’ve hinted at it above, but plain white render walls, and a sea of porcelain does not a garden make. Excessive hardscape can make a garden feel completely soulless, and the fashion of turning the garden into an ‘outdoor room’ can come at the expense of what makes a garden a garden – plants! Instead, when it comes to hardscape, consider using natural materials which instantly bring soul to a garden and keep the space feeling natural and soft.

For walling, step away from the white render and think about using biscuity tones, which feel so much gentler – let’s face it, we don’t live in Santorini and that wall isn’t going to stay white in the UK. Alternatively, cladding walls in stone or covering boundaries in climbers will bring a more immersive softness to a space.

And then, the most important element, be sure to hand over enough garden to plants (not lawn, it’s just another void). Divide up your hardscape with planting, and wrap it in planting, too – be generous with your borders. Your view from inside the house and out will be SO much more lovely.

While trends in garden design will always ebb and flow, the best gardens transcend trends altogether. You need only look at the incredible gardens of the RHS, or our beloved National Trust properties, to see that natural materials and plenty of planting stand the test of time over the fads or the new popular material of the moment. So, let’s take a leaf from their book, put plants first, and create spaces that work harmoniously with nature and the surrounding area, rather than against them.

Listen to Pollyanna talking about all things garden design in the Spring Conversations podcast at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

NEXT MONTH …
Barbara Segall delves into the importance of National Plant Collections and how you could help future proof garden plants in your plot

PHOTO: KATIE SPICER

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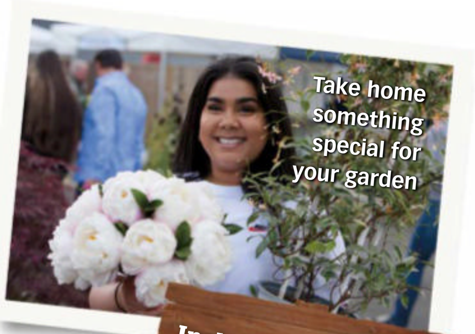

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In addition to a spectrum of **plant** Shopping in the **Floral Marquee** and **Plant Village**, this Show is the place to find tip-top **gardening kit**, from hand tools to garden rooms, and so much in between! Explore the **Artisan Gift Market** including clothes and accessories; an all-new area dedicated to kit and accessories for **pets**; and a curated collection of '**Best Buys**' as reviewed by *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*, next to the **Subscriber Club Lounge**.

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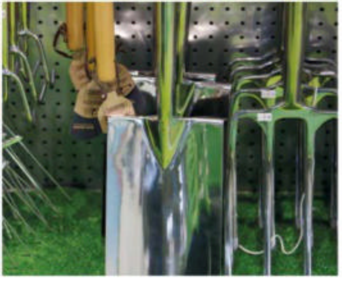

For the foodies

With entry to **Good Food Show** in your ticket, you can lunch at the **Good Food Restaurant**, treat yourself to **street food** including Chunk of Devon, Hush Hush Chefs and Ivor's Ice Cream; and shop from **famous foodie brands** as well as unique, **artisan producers** of delicious, quality food, drink and tasty treats.

Book your tickets

Learn something new

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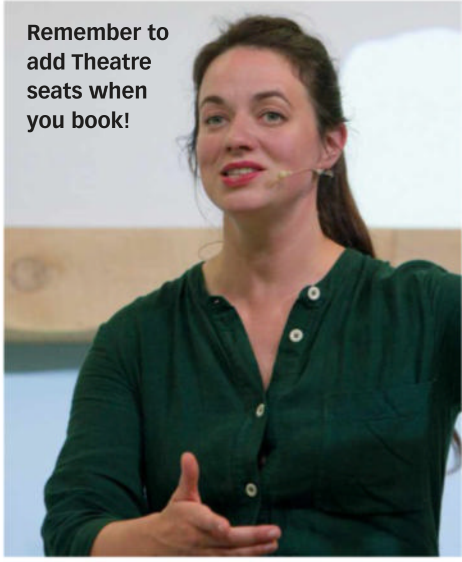

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DISCOVER • REVIEW • SHARE

WHAT TO DO NOW

50 things to do this month from the *Gardeners' World* team

This month!

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PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

Plant annual climbers

Annual climbers such as Spanish flag (*Ipomoea lobata*) and black-eyed Susan can be planted into warm, sheltered corners towards the end of the month. Make sure the plants have been hardened off for at least a week outside.

A sheltered spot will help the plants to develop quickly, without being at the mercy of strong winds. Plant them at the base of their supports, mixing a handful of well-rotted garden compost or leaf mould into the bottom of each planting hole. Water them in well and again when dry, and check the plants daily, loosely tying them to their supports with some soft string when they are tall enough.

If you plant within the wigwam watering is much easier

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Sow new lawn seed, ideally after rain has dampened the soil
- ☐ Prune early-flowering clematis after blooms have faded
- ☐ Water plants early in the morning or late evening, using rainwater if possible
- ☐ Keep tying in summer climbers as their new shoots extend
- ☐ Cover bare areas of soil with mulch to conserve moisture and boost nutrients

Tackle topiary

Trim topiary shapes and hedges now to thicken the growth and improve their fine textured surface. Use clean, sharp shears and aim to cut evenly to just above the point where this seasons' growth started. Yew, fine-leaved myrtle, holly and euonymus are all easy to form into topiary shapes.

Traditional topiary shaped from box plants is now vulnerable to fungal blight in most parts of the UK. To minimise the risk, avoid cutting box in wet, dull weather or long periods of drought, when the plant is stressed. Clean the shear blades with white spirit and remove all the trimmings from the hedge after cutting.

Use the top half of your shears' blade length for the finer details

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Woody stems can be useful as naturalistic plant su

Add emergency stakes

Quickly add some last-minute stakes to tall perennials if they are vulnerable, particularly if windy weather is forecast. Focus on the weakest stems and press canes in as low into the foliage as you can. Use string to tie individual stems to the cane. The canes have to

go in on the outside of t
clump and could be circ
support several stems a
in which case tie string
length of the canes to s
stems flopping.

If the ground is too ha
to get the canes in, wate
first will help soften it u

LOOK OUT FOR **Lily beetle**

This distinctive beetle is common on lilies. You may first spot the damage where the beetle and larvae feed on entire leaves, starting at the tip.

Larvae hatch from clusters of orange eggs on the underside

of the leaves and s
to feed straight aw
Pick them off at all
stages when you se
them. Birds, frogs a
ground beetles will
them, too. Plants m
still flower well but
bulbs will weaken a
slowly reduce in siz

---

advertisement feature

Kids review kits

This month, Daniyal, 8, builds the **LEGO® Cherry Blossoms** set

So, I really enjoyed creating this because I have never built a plant LEGO kit before, so it was a new challenge for me. It was easy to put together, and the instructions were clear and easy to follow.

I loved building the flowers because some of the pieces were so colourful and, slowly, I could see it appearing before my very eyes. The stems were the most challenging part because you have to repeat the same steps a few times, but I didn't need any help making them because I'm the ultimate LEGO expert!

I'm going to gift my sisters one stem each to display in their bedroom – I'm sure they'll love it because it's so pretty. I'd definitely recommend this set to my friends.

To get your hands on this and other fun LEGO sets, visit **lego.com** now

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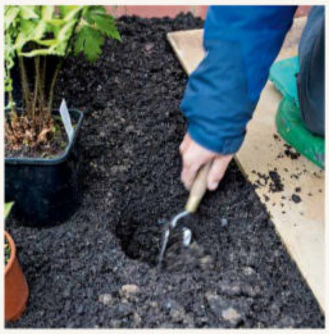
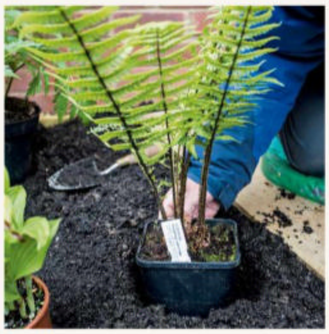
STEP BY STEP
Plant with ferns

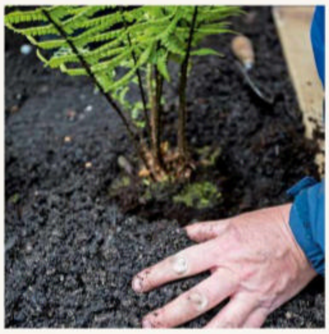
Turn an otherwise difficult, shady, damp part of the garden into a stunning feature by filling it with ferns. They will thrive and make a brilliant architectural foliage display in the garden. Do this after a spell of rain, and the more organic matter you add to the scheme, the better the plants will do.



1 CHOOSE a shady area with soil that holds moisture. Dig planting holes for the ferns, making them a little wider than the pot size. Add compost to the hole.



2 PLACE the pot into the hole to judge that you have the depth right before knocking the plant out of the pot and lowering the roots into the hole.



3 PUSH the soil in firmly around the plant, then hold the foliage up while spreading a 5cm mulch of organic matter around the plant.

Ideally use water that has been warmed in a can in the greenhouse

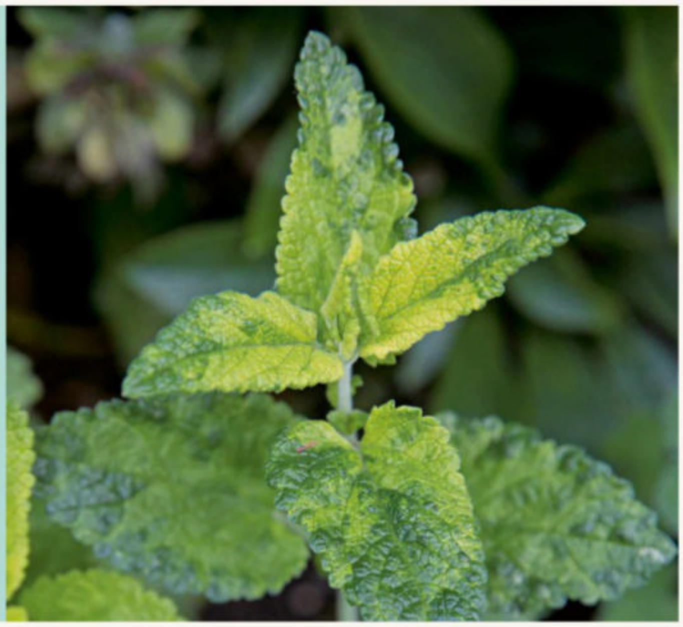
Water young annuals carefully

Soak annuals that are still waiting to be planted out. The roots in small pots can dry out easily when the plant is in full growth. Lift pots to feel the weight and check that they need it because some peat-free composts can look dry on the top but hold moisture beneath.

Water very carefully to avoid damaging the soft shoots and water low to soak the compost rather than just wet the leaves. Place your plants out of direct sun after watering to keep the leaves from scorching.

LOOK OUT FOR
Virus infection

Virus can appear as distorted growth or spots and blotches of yellowing or bleached marks. Plants can sometimes grow through infection and flower well. It's often spread by sap-sucking insects such as aphids, so protecting plants or picking off early colonies can help. Avoid buying plants with symptoms and only introduce certified virus-free fruit plants to the garden.



WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS

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A trio of Peruvian lilies

Alstroemerias are prized for long-stemmed blooms that make magnificent cut flowers. This superb collection will provide colour in borders and containers from summer to autumn, with plenty to spare for bouquets.

The Alstroemeria Summer Trio collection comprises:

Indian Summer
Compact with an upright habit, ensuring that stems are still a good length for cutting.
Height x Spread 75cm x 60cm
Flowers Jun-Oct

Summer Breeze
Shimmering bronze foliage sets off the glorious oranges and yellows of the blooms above.
H x S 75cm x 60cm **F** Jun-Oct

Summer Lovely
A hardy variety with a free-flowering habit. Forms a dense clump of lush-green foliage that contrasts with bright, scarlet blooms.
H X S 70cm x 50cm **F** Jun-Sep

- 3 jumbo plugs (1 of each) ~~£35.97~~ **£16.99 SAVE £18.98** *(KB8462)*
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Alstroemeria Tree Everest Mix

These tall, hardy perennials produce long stems of tropical blooms that form a vibrant column of colour throughout summer. Mix contains the varieties Allure, Energy and Nirvana.
H x S 1.4m x 75cm **F** Jun-Oct
- 3 jumbo plugs (1 of each) **£19.99** *(KB8472)*
- 6 jumbo plugs (2 of each) ~~£39.98~~ **£32.99 SAVE £6.99** *(KB8473)*

Phlox Pharao Blue Eye

Useful for dry, sunny spots where other plants just won't grow. Once established, it will produce an impenetrable mat of fragrant flowers.
H x S 15cm x 50cm
F Apr-Jun
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- 10 Postiplugs ~~£19.98~~ **£12.99 SAVE £6.99** *(KB8234)*
- 20 Postiplugs ~~£29.97~~ **£19.99 SAVE £9.98** *(KF4732)*

Penstemon Pensham Trio

Mesmerising bells with satiny-white throats carried above semi-evergreen foliage. Trio comprises 'Pensham Amelia Jane', 'Pensham Czar' and 'Pensham Laura'.
H x S 90cm x 45cm **F** Jun-Oct
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Snails often congregate in the shady area around the rim of pots

Check pots for snails and remove

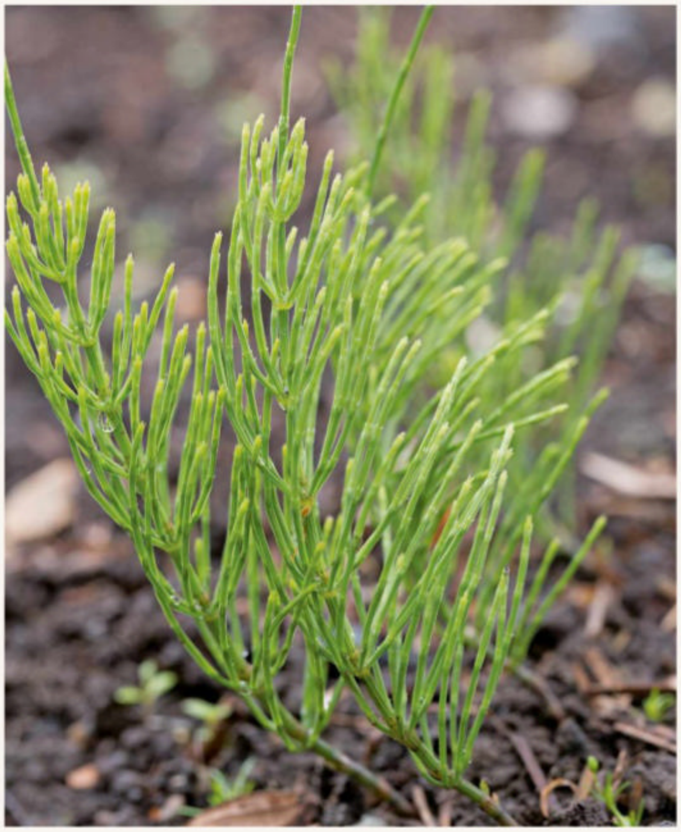
Take a look inside the rim of containers and under foliage for snails and re-home them on the compost heap or under hedges or shrubs, putting them well away from vulnerable plants. Snails feed at night, then take refuge somewhere during the day so check behind climbers, cracks in brickwork, under the edge of path lines or among debris on the soil surface.

You could lay some strategically placed pieces of cardboard as decoys near vulnerable plants. Lift them every morning to remove and reduce the population of both snails and slugs.

Remove mare's tail from beds

Keep on top of mare's tail in the garden to stop it swamping your garden plants. It's a vigorous grower but with regular hoeing you can weaken it enough to reduce the nuisance. If you can also dig out the dark, stringy roots that helps, but they can grow down very deep so you'll never get it all. Good drainage really helps to weaken this plant as it thrives on moisture-retentive soil.

Put the foliage of this weed into the municipal compost bin where the heat of a big composting system makes sure it can't regrow.



Mare's tail is hard to beat but can be controlled with weeding

Beechgrove

Beechgrove Garden

BEECHGROVE'S BACK

The new series is back on BBC Scotland and BBC TWO. Check TV listings for details.

Only put young plants in the ground once they are ready

VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE

Toughen plants up in a cold frame

In Beechgrove's northerly climate, young plants must be hardened off in cold frames until they can cope with the great Scottish outdoors. Half-hardy annuals such as cosmos can be wiped out by a single frost. Once plants are in the ground we have fleece at the ready just in case. In a cold spring, we keep well-anchored cloches in place for edibles until the end of May. This extends the growing season so good yields are achieved for edible crops before temperatures fall in autumn. Frost, cold and drying winds are finally behind us by June.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Prepare flower and veg beds for the direct sowing of hardy annuals and root crops**
- ☐ **Keep earthing up potato plants until the leaves of adjacent plants start to touch**
- ☐ **Plant up some hanging baskets to bulk up properly ready for placement outside, but protect under cover until June**
- ☐ **Trim established Portguese laurels and holly shrubs lightly towards the end of the month**

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

Ready, set, mow

Tackle large lawns precisely and efficiently with the new Segway Navimow X3 Series robotic mower

Gardeners' World magazine
BEST BUY
Robotic mowers

The Navimow X3 Series can cover even the largest lawns

Now that spring is truly in full swing, you're probably busy getting your garden ready for plenty of summery outdoor gatherings with your family and friends. Of course, this may mean spending more time mowing your lawn, as grass grows more quickly at this time of year. But with Segway's latest robotic mower, the Navimow X3 Series, you can maintain even the largest of lawns with ease.

Whether you have a big garden at home or you're a professional gardener with multiple lawns to maintain, the X3 can mow areas between 1,500 and 10,000m² (approximately the size of one and a half football pitches) with unparalleled efficacy. Read on to discover just some of its innovative features.

Master efficiency

If you're looking for maximum coverage with minimal effort, the X3 is the mower for you. It's fitted with six upgraded blades for a superior cutting performance, allowing it to tackle a 5,000m² area of lawn in just 24 hours, with an average of 300m² covered per hour.

The X3 uses an advanced locating system (EFLS 3.0) via satellite signals to keep it precise and stable, even in weak signal areas. VisionFence technology gives it a 300-degree view of its surroundings, while smart route planning allows it to avoid obstacles, including people and animals. Plus, its advanced design can easily handle slopes up to 27 degrees or 50 per cent.

The X3 also offers ultra-fast charging

Embrace simplicity

Better still, the X3 is super easy to operate, as AI-assisted mapping enables it to automatically navigate your lawn, with no perimeter wires required. Instead, you can quickly mark out virtual boundaries and off-limit areas (such as wildlife havens) using the Navimow app, then leave the mower to quietly do its thing while you get on with the rest of your gardening.

You can remotely control the X3 and monitor its progress at any time in the app, and you can even link it to your Amazon Alexa or Google Home smart speakers, if you'd rather control it using voice commands. Worried you might lose track of it? Each mower also has an anti-theft alarm, app-based GPS tracking and an AirTag compartment for extra peace of mind.

Need something smaller?

Try the Navimow i Series, designed for lawns up to 500m², which is around the size of two tennis courts. The i105 was recently awarded a Best Buy badge from *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* for being the best robotic mower for wire-free mowing.

SEGWAY

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***Ashley Edwards** shows you what to prune in the garden this month*

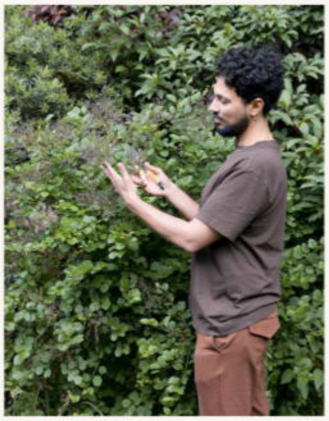
Use a smaller pair of shears if you want to produce a finer, more topiary-like effect on your ceanothus

Give ceanothus a spring trim

Ceanothus was never my favourite plant, but then I realised why. All I had been seeing was badly pruned specimens in car parks! Left unpruned these plants become leggy with the bright blue flowers borne on top, out of sight, with the rough, twiggy growth underneath at eye level. To get the best out of your ceanothus, prune once a year, as soon as flowering finishes. This allows the plant time to put on next year's flowering growth.

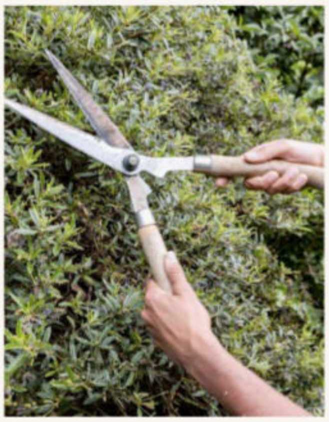
Ceanothus may only have a short flowering period, but it really puts on a show. It looks great against a sunny wall, trained over an arch or doorway, or even cloud-pruned. The evergreen leaves provide a good backdrop for other plants for the rest of the year.

STEP BY STEP
Ceanothus



1 USE secateurs to remove the old flowerheads, going back to a set of leaves. Even if the plant has plenty of space, this will help keep your ceanothus bushy and in good shape.

2 SELECT the oldest, thickest stems of the plant and cut them back by up to two thirds, using loppers. Be careful not to take out more than a third of the plant in total.



3 CLIP over the whole plant with shears if you want a tighter, topiary-like effect. Remove spent flowerheads and up to a third of the growth. Step back and monitor the shapes as you go.

WORDS: ASHLEY EDWARDS. PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS

Size up the job and consider donning long sleeves, eye protection and gloves before you get started

Tidy up early-flowering spiraea

Early-flowering spiraea is known for the pure white flowers that festoon its gracefully arching stems in spring. To keep this plant looking its best, regular pruning is needed.

As with most early spring-flowering shrubs, pruning should be carried out immediately after flowering has finished. This will allow the plant time to produce flowering growth through the summer months.

Prune back the flowered stems to a set of strong leaf buds. Spiraea can end up looking spindly if only the very tips are cut back. Think about how much space you have for the plant to grow into over the summer because this will also determine how far you cut back.

If you want to reduce the overall size, remove up to a third of the oldest stems to rejuvenate and encourage beautiful arching stems. You can also remove any crossing branches and dead stems.

Spiraea are surprisingly scratchy, so I'd recommend wearing long sleeves, gloves and protective eyewear when pruning it. After pruning, place a layer of mulch around the base of the plant. You can use garden compost or bark chippings to retain moisture, improve soil health and feed your plant.

Select the weaker, more spindly growth for removal with secateurs

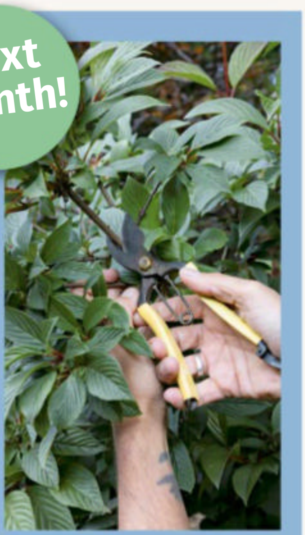
Pruning out a proportion of the older stems regenerates the plant

Thin out deutzias

Identify any old woody stems and, using secateurs, cut them back to a main stem or, if the whole stem is overcrowded, down to the ground. You can remove up to a third of the old stems. Done over the course of three years, this will rejuvenate the whole plant. Remove any crossing or dead branches to improve airflow and encourage fresh, healthy growth.

Once the spring flowers have faded, cut back the tips of the shrub to maintain a neat shape. Deutzias tend to sprawl outwards and become a tangle of stems, so pruning regularly is important to maintain a well-balanced and manageable plant. Mulch after pruning to boost nutrients and preserve soil moisture.

Next month!



☐ Ashley shows how to keep viburnums healthy and full of flowers by pruning regularly

WORDS: ASHLEY EDWARDS. PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS

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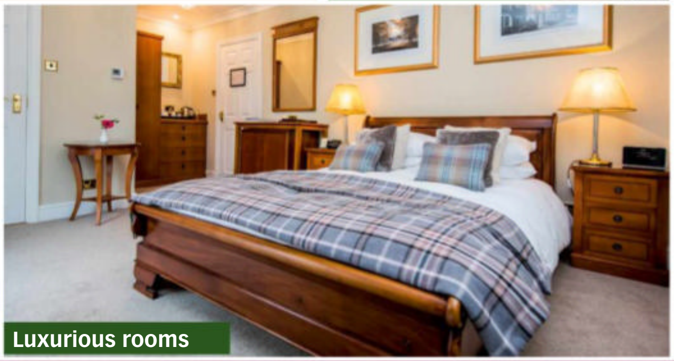

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*Hand Representative Photos: Photos of hands before and after two weeks of application. Cream was applied daily, once a day and as needed. The pictures only show an example of application. Results may vary.

With their vibrant colours and strong scent, freesias make great indoor displays

Plant freesia bulbs now

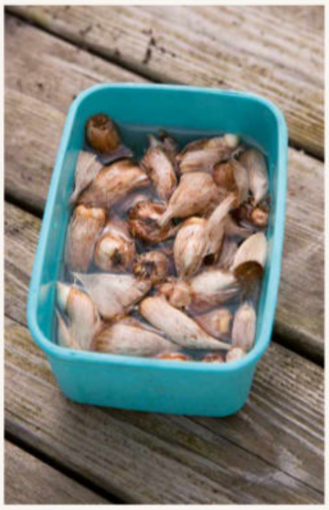
Plant freesia bulbs this month to mix into a flower border, grow in pots or add to your cutting garden. They can be started off in pots or planted directly into the ground outside, as long as there is no risk of frost once they have started to shoot.

Freesia bulbs need plenty of moisture to grow but don't do well in very heavy ground, so providing extra drainage is key. They also do best with plenty of nutrients, so give them a feed of high-potash fertiliser before flowering, applied as either granules scattered around the plants and watered, or as a liquid feed – homemade comfrey tea is ideal.

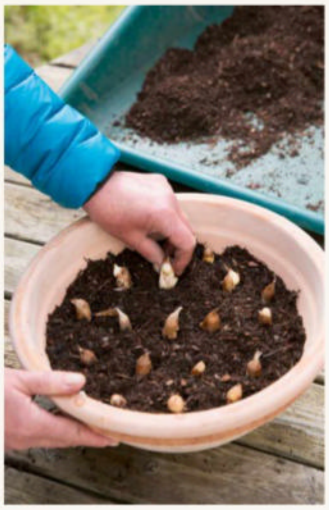
Add stakes of twiggy prunings or low string lines to keep the flower stems straight for cutting. Expect to have blooms by July or August.

Freesia bulbs are tender, so they'll need to be lifted or their pots brought in and overwintered indoors. With care, these bulbs will last for years.

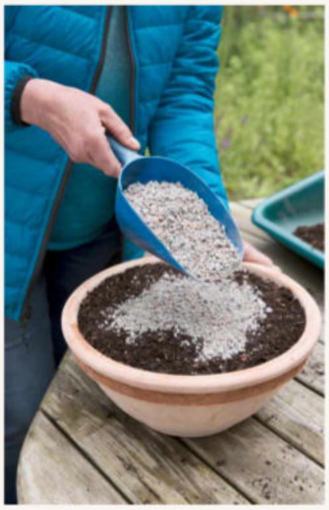
STEP BY STEP Planting freesia bulbs



1 SOAK bulbs in a container of tepid water for 30 mins to help initiate growth and reduce the need for excess watering when the bulbs have been planted.



2 FILL the base of a container with loam-based peat-free potting compost with extra grit added. Arrange the bulbs 4cm apart, with the pointed ends up.



3 COVER with a 3-5cm layer of compost. Firm gently, making sure it is level. Dress with a layer of washed grit to keep the emerging shoots dry at the base.

4 WATER, then place the pot in a warm spot in full sun once the shoots appear. Check that the risk of frosts is over before you put the pot outside.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

Sow your FREE seeds

This month, subscribers receive FREE lettuce Salad Bowl Mix and *Eschscholzia* 'Orange King' seeds. Lettuce Salad Bowl Mix is an easy and attractive variety to grow. Sown little and often, you can have Salad Bowl Mix on your plate for months, saving pounds on buying leaves from the supermarket.

Californian poppies are easy to grow direct in the soil, to add cheerful colour without breaking the bank. With its orange flowers and silvery-green leaves, they add an exotic flourish to pots and beds.

3 reasons to grow *Eschscholzia* 'Orange King'

- A hardy annual that adds simple but striking summer colour
- Attractive, delicate, silvery-green foliage
- Will self-sow to provide easy flowers for years to come

Sowalong together

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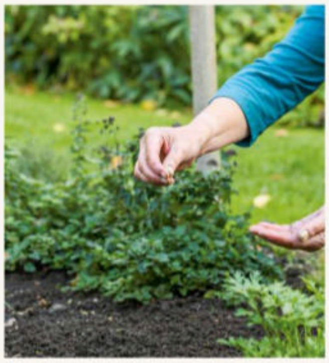
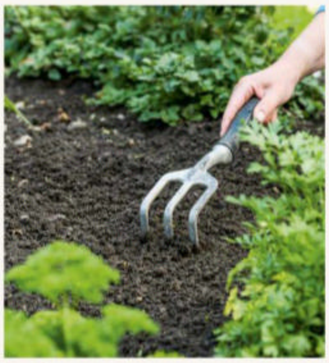
STEP BY STEP Sowing your Californian poppies from seed

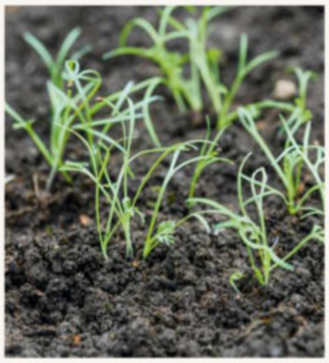


1 SPRINKLE the seed thinly but evenly over a well-raked patch of damp soil where they are to flower, ideally in full sun.



2 USE a small hand rake to gently work the seeds into the soil. Make sure the soil surface is level when you've finished.

3 ADD a label as a reminder of what you've sown and to make sure the area isn't trodden on or planted with anything else.



4 LOOK out for seedlings in 7-10 days. Once they are big enough to handle, thin them out to leave a plant every 15cm.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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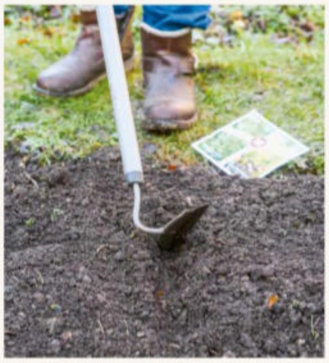
Gardeners' World
Fothergill's
Eschscholzia
'Orange King'
Striking plant with silver foliage
Gardeners' World
Fothergill's
Lettuce
Salad Bowl Mix
Tasty mix of red and green leaves

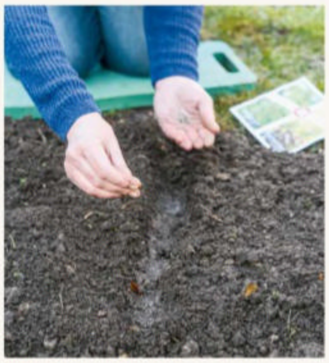
3 reasons to grow lettuce Salad Bowl Mix

- An attractive mix of red and green leaves
- Treat as cut-and-come-again for several harvests from just one sowing
- A good source of vitamins A and C

STEP BY STEP Sowing your lettuce Salad Bowl Mix from seed



1 USE a draw hoe to make a shallow drill for sowing the seed into, making sure the area is clear of weeds and big stones.



2 WATER the drill and surrounding area, then sow the seed thinly. If you water after sowing, you will disturb the seed.

3 USE the hoe to carefully push soil over the seed so that it is covered with a 1cm layer of damp soil. Label the row.

Don't miss next month's FREE* seeds

Gardeners' World
Ox-eye daisy
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Bright Lights

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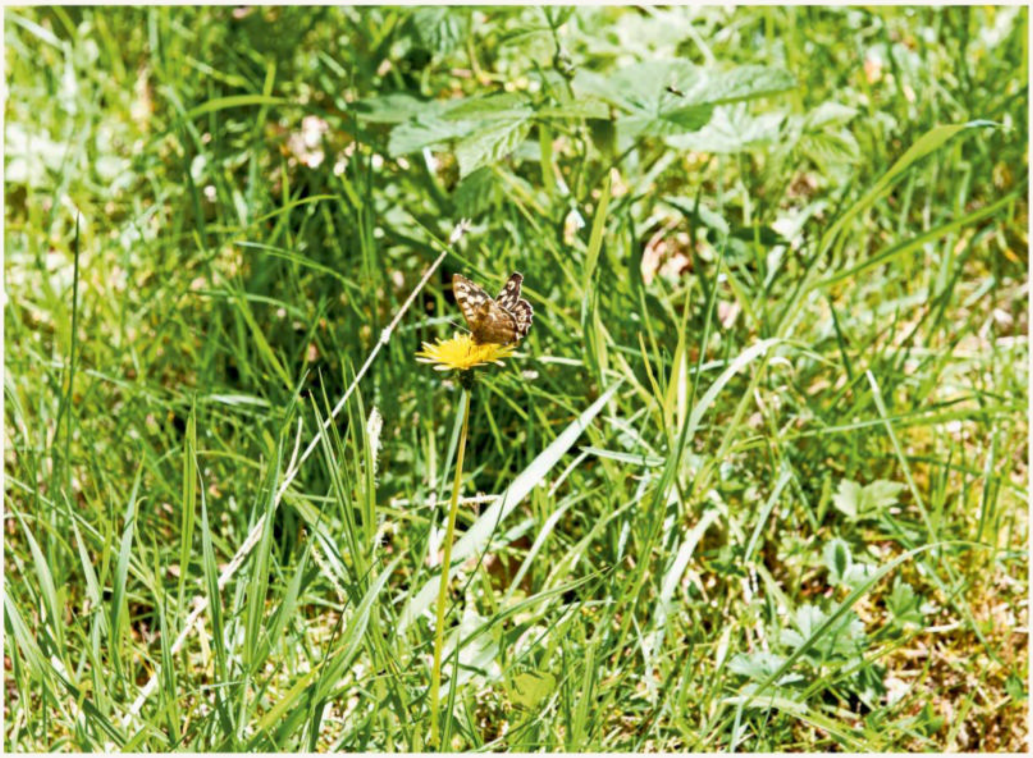
RHS CHELSEA GARDEN PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2019 WINNER

***Kate Bradbury**'s top tasks to do this month to make your garden more wildlife-friendly*



The speckled wood prefers tall grasses and some shade, feeding on flowers when aphids are low

Take part in No Mow May

Join the Plantlife No Mow May campaign and avoid mowing your lawn this month to boost biodiversity and raise the profile of lawns as meadows across the UK. By letting some or all of your grass grow long, you will provide egg-laying opportunities for several species of butterfly, including the speckled wood, gatekeeper and Essex skipper.

Any wildflowers already present in the lawn will bloom, attracting pollinators, and others may arrive naturally. But all that gets razed when you resume mowing in June, so make a real difference and don't mow until September!

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Spend time looking into your pond and you may catch sight of smooth newts. Newts mate later than frogs and toads, and don't spawn in the same way. Instead, they take part in a glorious courtship display, with the male wafting pheromones at the female before leaving her a parcel of sperm, which she may use to fertilise her eggs.

Red mason bees keep their young safe by lining nest cells with mud

Make mud for red mason bees

Help red mason bees make their nests by mixing garden soil with water and leaving it in a dish near your bee hotel – the bees will soon find it. These creatures use mud to make individual nest cells, in which they lay an egg on a mound of pollen. The grubs hatch and eat the pollen, then pupate into adults and emerge a year later.

If conditions are dry, the bees will struggle to gather mud to make their nests, so will have less time and energy for egg laying.

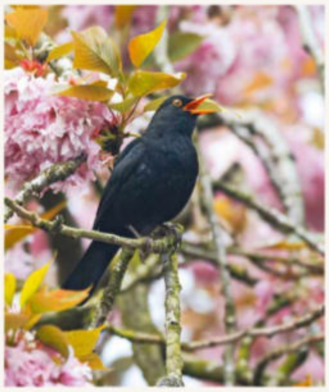
DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Leave garden edges wild and make hedgehog highways for Hedgehog Awareness Week, which runs 4-10 May
- ☐ Sow bee-friendly annuals, such as field scabious, *Ammi majus*, cornflowers and cosmos, to fill gaps in the border
- ☐ Keep your bird baths topped up so birds can drink fresh water and keep their feathers in good condition
- ☐ Avoid weeding out unwanted plants as many will be housing caterpillars and insects, which birds feed to their chicks

Learn birdsong

Get outdoors and learn how to identify birdsong. May is the month of the most intense birdsong, with International Dawn Chorus Day celebrated on 4 May.

Join in by downloading a bird identifier app such as Merlin Bird ID, and start listening to the birds. Begin with one or two – the earlier you start, the easier it is. The blackbird and robin are first, with the blackbird singing a rich, flutey song and the robin warbling like a trickling stream. Later they'll be joined by the song thrush, which has a shouty, repetitive call, and the great tit, which has an easy 'tee-cher, tee-cher' song.



Get up early to catch the blackbird singing as the sun rises

WORDS: KATE BRADBURY. PHOTOS: GETTY/FALOMBINI, LIZ LEYDEN, WESTEND61

Glistening Geranium Jolly Jewels Collection

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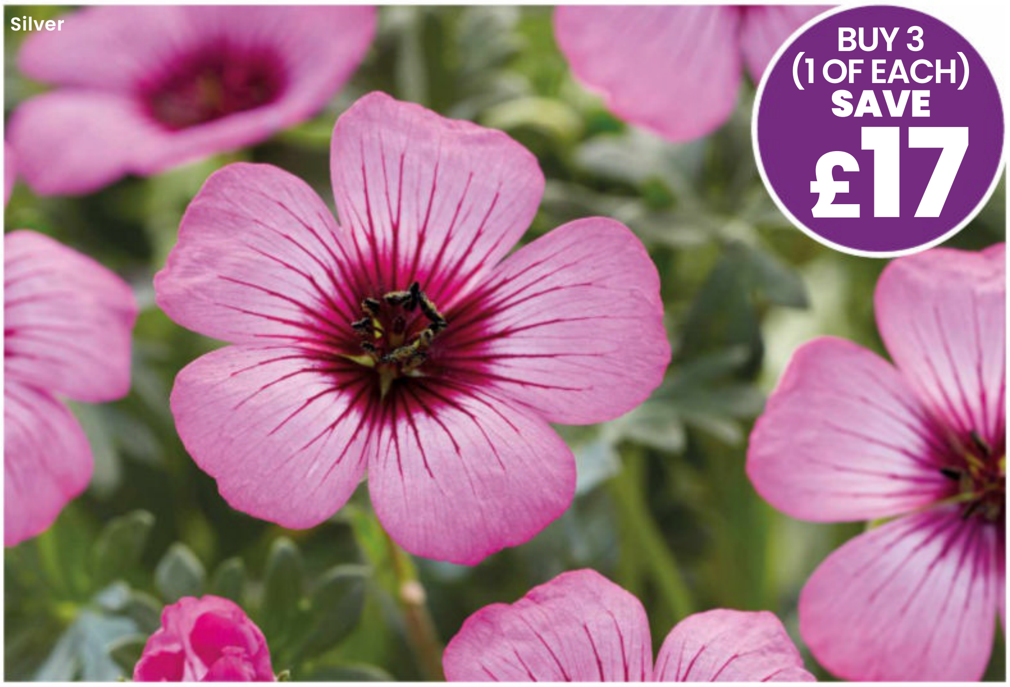

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Let this radiant trio weave its magic through your garden, enchanting you with its delicate yet striking presence.

Each open, cup-shaped bloom—around 3cm across—unveils a mesmerizing heart, framed by darkly veined petals kissed with soft, ethereal accents. From March to November, mounds of lush, verdant foliage form a captivating backdrop, their rounded, deeply lobed leaves shimmering with silvery undersides that dance in the sunlight.

The exquisite 'Glistening Geranium cinereum Jolly Jewel Collection' bursts into bloom from May to September, offering a breathtaking display of pink, purple, and coral flowers. This charming trio— 'Purple', 'Salmon', and 'Silver'—creates a seamless flow of colour, ensuring beauty across the seasons. Perfect for borders, alpine gardens, or containers, these resilient gems thrive in moist, well-drained soil, bringing effortless elegance and year-round delight to your outdoor sanctuary.

Naomi

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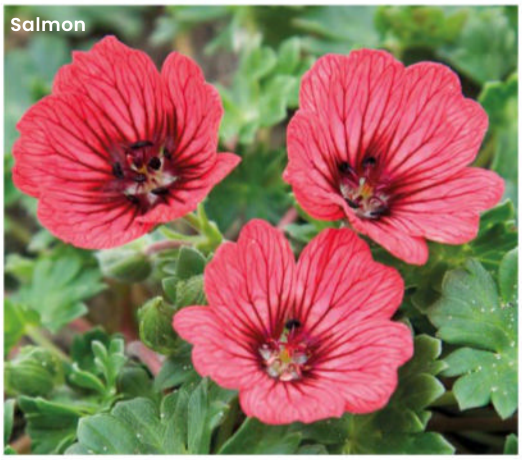

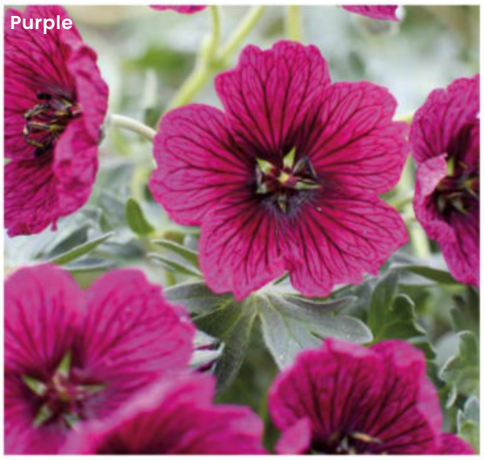

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GWHY

Plant out geums

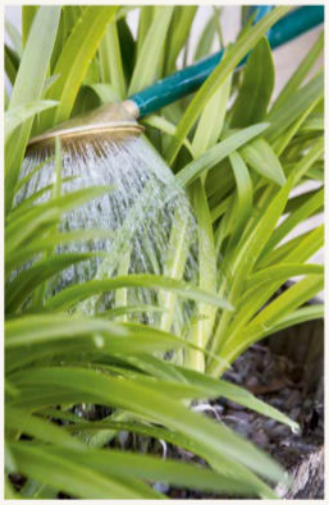
Geums are tremendous plants for adding colour to borders in late spring and summer. Seek out some gaps towards the front and these hardy perennials will add a bit of sparkle.

They love moisture and will grow well in clay soil, so long as it isn't too heavy and is well mulched.

You can plant into fairly small border gaps: make a hole twice as wide and deep as the plant's pot.

Even a small plant can create big impact this summer because although the plants form tight clumps, the tall flower stems will cover a larger area, mingling well with neighbouring plants. Water well after planting, and again during any dry spells until the end of autumn.

Geums are ideal for popping into tiny spaces between other border plants



Keep potted agapanthus moist and well fed through the summer

Feed agapanthus

Make sure agapanthus in pots flower well by feeding them. Use a high-potash liquid feed. This contains a balance of nutrients, with more potassium for flower development. Choose a specialist feed, or a flower or tomato fertiliser.

Check the instructions on the pack and measure the dose carefully. It's a good idea to part-fill the can, then add the fertiliser, before finishing filling it up. This ensures a good mix. Soak the plant with the feed; agapanthus tolerate drought but do best with plenty of moisture when in growth.

QUICK SOLUTIONS

Divide spring flowers such as primulas now to keep them fresh and get more plants. Pull them into clumps, trim off old flower stems and the oldest leaves, then repot into loam-based compost or plant back in the garden. Keep well watered.

Perennial sunflowers will be less floppy if cut back a bit now

'Chelsea chop' perennials

Cut back certain perennials at the end of the month, when the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is on.

Early-flowered sprawlers such as geraniums and alchemilla can be cut right back with shears; they'll grow back in a few weeks.

Reduce the stem height by a third on later-flowering plants such as sedum that tend to flop when the flowers develop. These will flower on strong, short stems.

Alternatively, remove up to a half of the stems completely. Monarda and echinacea work well this way, giving you a succession of flowers over a longer period.

Lay out any lifted tulips in a dry and airy spot for a few weeks

Sort tulips

Lift tulips from borders or pots to dry and store them, ready for replanting next autumn. Use a border fork to lever them out gently so that they are still firmly attached to the live foliage.

The old flowerhead can be cut to stop any seed development from sapping the plant's energy. The foliage must die back naturally to add energy to the bulb. Line them out on dry newspaper in ranked stacks, with the bulb always exposed to the dry air. Cut the old top growth away once it's papery.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

Removing the tips diverts energy around the plant, leading to more compact, less floppy growth

Pinch out summer bedding

Encourage bushier growth with many more flowering sideshoots by pinching out the tips of your bedding plants. Use your fingernails or light snippers to pinch into the soft growth. Take it back to the junction of a node or bud that will provide the new shoots.

Do this to plants that have developed few sideshoots. Just pinch out a third of the growth on these and the lower buds will all break out into growth to create a sturdy plant with plenty of flowers.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Direct sow annuals such as *Ammi majus*, nigella and linaria outside**
- ☐ **Water all newly-planted flowers frequently to help them establish**
- ☐ **Thin out seedlings and dig up or transplant unwanted self-sown volunteer plants**
- ☐ **Sow biennials such as wallflowers and sweet Williams for flowering next year**

Cut down low into the plant to avoid leaving a mess of stems

Tidy alpines

Cut out the old flower stems to tidy up alpines that have finished their flush of spring flowering. Cut the stems off with sharp snips, going back into the foliage.

This stops old flower stems flopping over the new growth to cause surface mould.

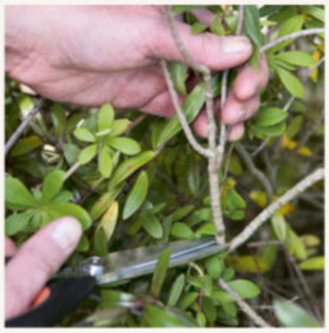
Some alpine plants such as sempervivums produce new rosettes for flowering while the flowered rosettes die back, so it's worth snipping them out to give room for the new growth and leave it looking fresh.

Finish by topping up the mulch to keep the crown dry and the plants looking smart.

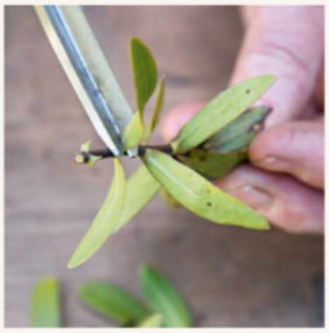
STEP BY STEP

Take new hebe cuttings

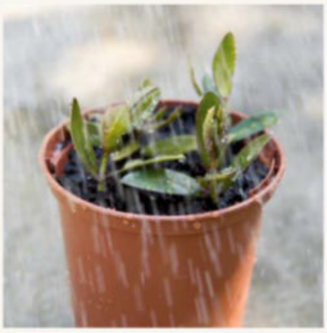
Make cuttings from fresh new growth on hebes. They root easily in a covered propagator or on a windowsill with a polythene bag over them. Air them for an hour every few days to stop them rotting. They will be growing on new roots in four or five weeks.



1 COLLECT non-flowering shoots. Branched shoots are good, making several cuttings. Cut just above a bud so that the replacement growth is neat.



2 USE a knife or scissors to prepare the cuttings by removing the lower leaves and making sure there is a bud intact at the base. Pinch out the soft tip.



3 FILL a pot with gritty compost, firm it well then space cuttings around the edge of the pot. Water, then place somewhere warm and humid.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

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A pot containing bedding and hardy plants will provide a longer period of interest

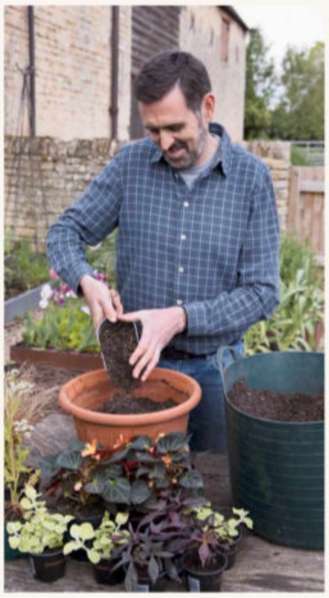
Pot up bedding and hardy plants

Now is a good time to create a container display of tender bedding plants for the patio. The beauty of growing these in pots is that if there is an unexpected frost forecast, you've got a mobile display that can be moved indoors overnight to escape the cold weather.

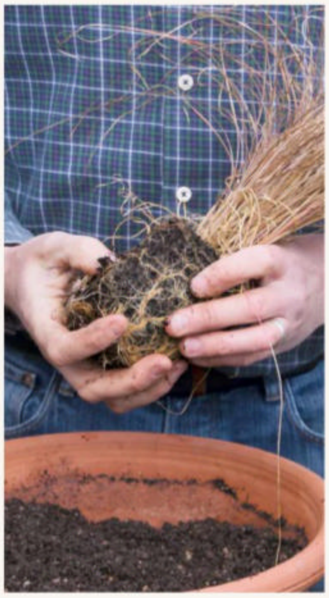
Growing hardy plants alongside the bedding gives you more options and provides a useful structure to your planting scheme, so that you still have an eyecatching feature while you wait for your bedding to flower.

Check that each plant you want in your pot has the same growing requirements as each other. Also look at their final heights (check the labels) and think about the best place on the patio to keep them so that each plant, as well as the whole feature, is shown off well. Check the pot every couple of days and water each time the compost is dry when you push your finger into it.

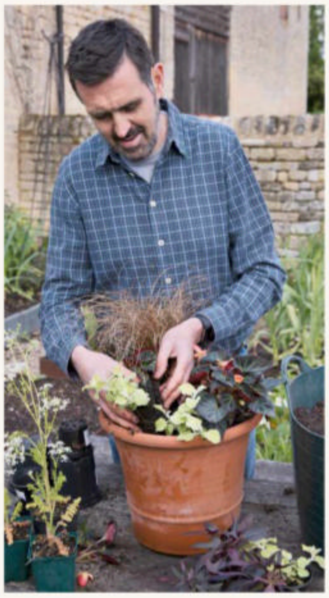
STEP BY STEP Creating a bedding and hardy plants container



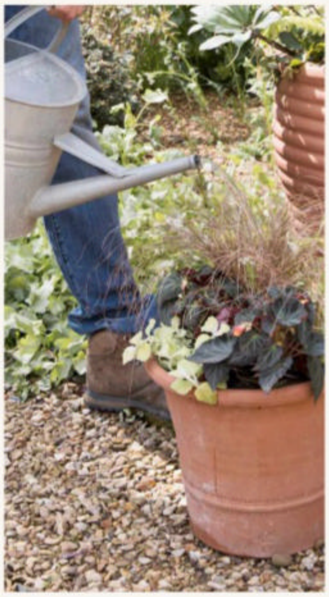
1 CHOOSE a pot that is wide enough for all your plants, and fill it three-quarters full with an equal parts mix of peat-free multi-purpose and a soil-based compost.



2 PLACE the tallest plant first, because this will provide the backbone for the display. The wispy *Carex comans* I've used will add movement if it catches a breeze.



3 ADD the next tallest plant, then position the shortest plants around the edge. Keep filling in gaps with compost and firming it down well to secure the plants.



4 CHECK that all the rootballs are covered, then water in well before moving the pot to its desired position, so that the bedding plants get plenty of sun.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

When digging the hole, check that the soil is free draining and add organic matter

Plant out a pot-grown rose

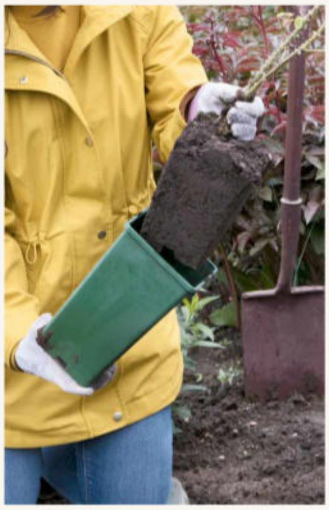
Get a pot-grown rose in the ground now, while the soil is warming but summer temperatures haven't yet reached their peak, so there are some weeks of stress-free growth for root establishment.

Roses do well in moisture-retentive garden soil that drains well enough not to puddle. Clay soil is particularly good for roses, but you need to break up the bottom of the hole if the soil is very heavy to be sure it will drain after planting. Add lots of organic matter whether the soil is heavy or on the light side, because this will hold moisture and make gaps to improve drainage.

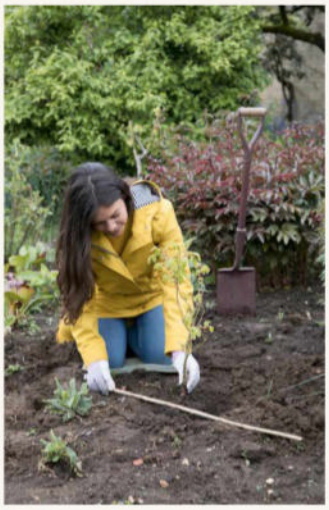
Roses flower well as long as they have enough light, so full sun is ideal. But providing they get at least half a day of sun they should be a great success.

Keep the ground around the rose free from weeds and top up the mulch in autumn. You'll have some flowers this year and if it's a repeat-flowering shrub rose, you can deadhead and look forward to flowers right into autumn.

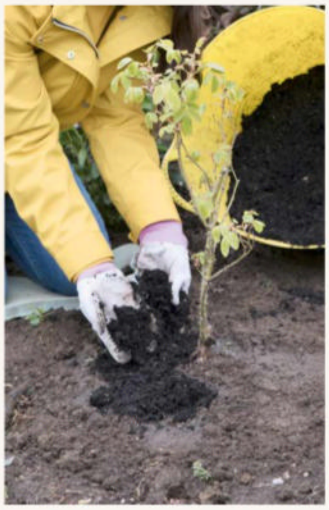
STEP BY STEP Planting out a pot-grown rose



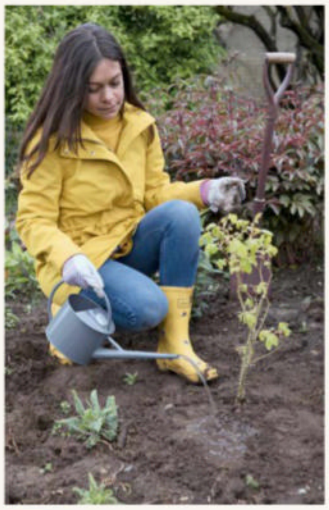
1 DIG a hole slightly deeper and twice as wide as the pot. Carefully take the pot off the roots and loosen them a little at the base before placing the plant in the hole.



2 PLACE a cane across the hole so the graft union sits level with soil, before filling soil around the rootball. Hold the plant level while firming it in.



3 SPREAD a thick layer of organic mulch over the rootball. Garden compost is good but composted manure is best as it provides nutrients for weeks.



4 GIVE the rose a good, long soak directly at the rootball. Repeat this throughout this season, particularly during dry spells, to make sure the plant roots well.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

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Pheromone traps interrupt the lifecycle of fruit pests, but attracting birds into the garden also helps

Use pheromone traps on fruit

Hang a pheromone trap in a fruit tree to help control the damage done to the crop by tunnelling moth larvae. The pheromone mimics the chemical used by the female to attract a mate. Apply the pheromone to a sticky sheet in the box and the males will investigate and be trapped. The chemical is specific to the insect. Codling moth larvae feed in apples for example, plum moth inside plums. These traps used every year will reduce the breeding pairs to save much of the crop.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Stake pea plants as they grow, using garden prunings or pea netting**
- ☐ **Make sure pollinating insects have access to greenhouses, cloches and polytunnels**
- ☐ **Water acid-loving crops such as blueberries and cranberries with collected rainwater**
- ☐ **Transplant hardened off plants to their final positions once frost threat has passed**

Wear gloves if you are worried that stems have become prickly

Pull raspberry suckers out

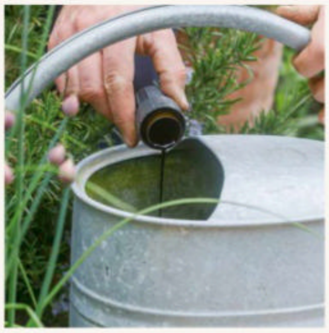
Pull out any raspberry suckers or seedlings you see before they get so big that you have to dig them out from among other crops, which will cause disruption and may reduce harvests. The roots of raspberries can grow out a distance away from the main row and send up shoots among germinating crops and compete with other established plants.

Pulled young, suckers are easy to sever from the root but that won't be the last you see of them. There are plenty more buds underground ready to put out new shoots, so keep onto them through the growing season.

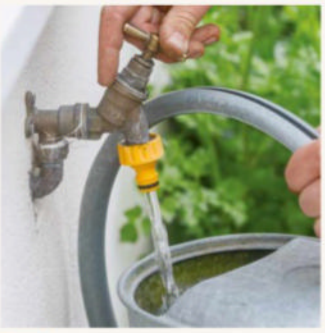
STEP BY STEP

Feed pot crops

Choose the right liquid feed for crops in pots. Some are designed for flowering and fruiting, while others are for leafy growth. Some herbs will be hungry feeders, while Mediterranean ones need very little feed. Water from your rainwater butts is good as it will be at a similar temperature to the compost.



1 MEASURE the correct dose of liquid feed and pour it into the watering can. Check the dosage, because it can vary with the stage of plant growth.



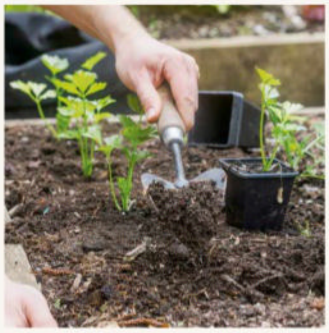
2 FILL the can with water, making sure the feed is evenly distributed in the solution. If not, use a stick to mix the solution together in the can.

3 CHECK that compost isn't bone-dry before you water on the feed. If the plant is too thirsty, the instant supply of food can scorch dehydrated plant cells.

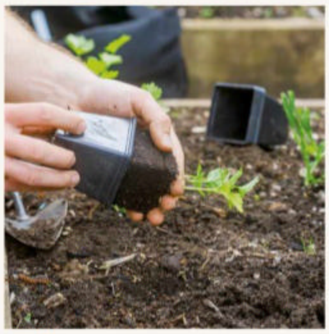
WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

STEP BY STEP
Plant celery

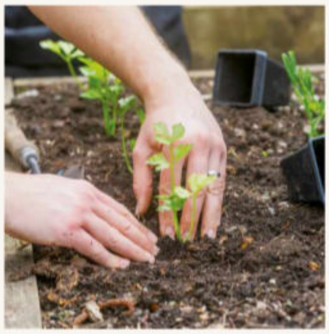
Plant some celery if you haven't raised plants from seed. Module-grown plants are in garden centres now. It's worth buying a few and hardening them off to cope with outdoor conditions for a week or so before planting. Celery does best with a long growing season and plenty of water. Protect young plants from slugs and snails.



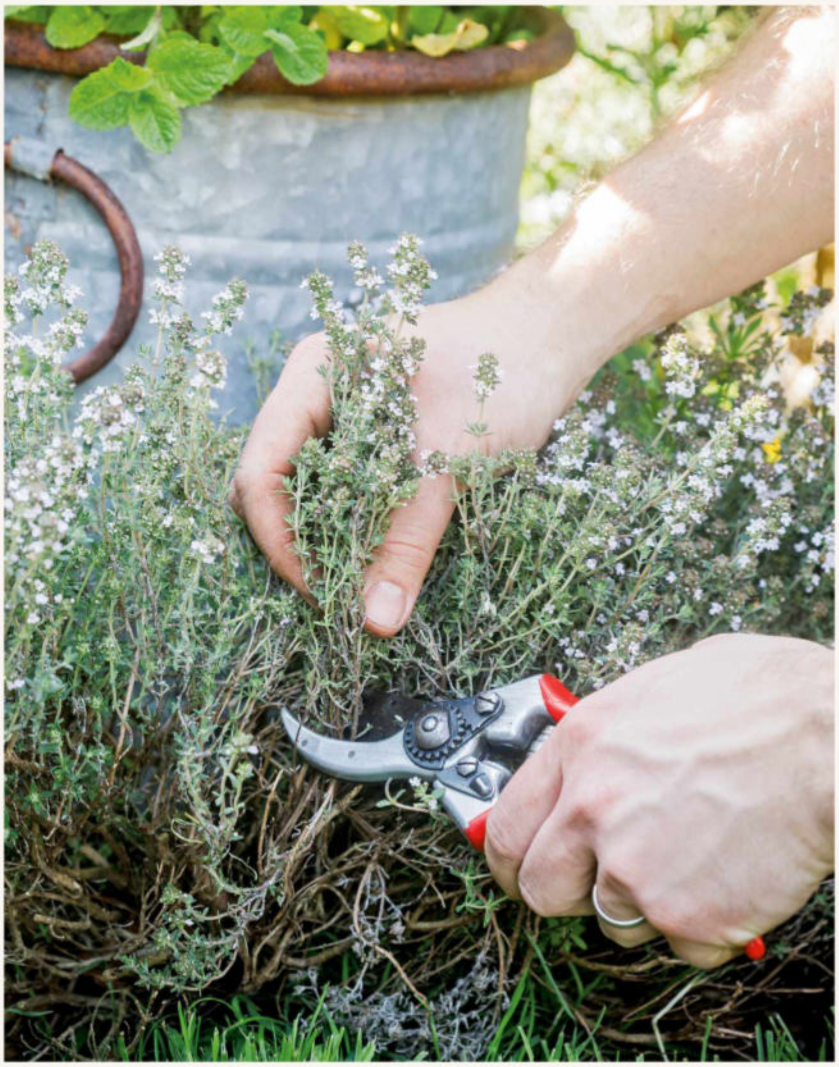
1 CHOOSE a sunny site with rich, moisture-retentive soil. Make holes as deep as the root modules and around 20cm apart. Arrange plants in a block, not rows.



2 SUPPORT plants at the base while removing the pot, and check that they are fully rooted out before planting. Delay planting or use fleece if frosts are on the way.



3 LOWER the rootball into the hole and firm the plant in so that the top of the rootball is just below the surface. Give them a thorough soak to water them in.



Thyme grows back strongly if trimmed at this time of year

Cut back and harvest thyme

Harvest the shoots of thyme as and when you need them for the kitchen. At this time of year they can be cut right back to encourage new growth, but check that you can see buds breaking at the base.

This rejuvenates the shrub. It has all summer to grow back and recover. If you decide to harvest it all, tie it into small bunches and hang to dry somewhere airy. Leaves can be stripped and stored for the winter. The fresh flowers are edible, too, and make a pretty garnish on salads or desserts.

Sideshoots are soft enough to be removed with your fingers

Train growth on tomato plants

Pinch out the young sideshoots on tomatoes that you are training up canes as single stems. Most tomatoes have a sprawling natural habit, so sideshoots will continually grow from the axils between leaf and stem. Check for these weekly to keep on top of them.

Be careful right at the top of the plant because you could pinch out the growing tip by mistake. Don't worry if you do because a lower sideshoot can be trained in as a replacement. Enjoy the smell as you pinch into the soft growth.

Next month!

☐ **Keep patio plants flowering well**

☐ **Harvest strawberries at their peak**

☐ **Plant out sweetcorn and late courgettes**

☐ **Take softwood cuttings from shrubs**

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

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Jardin Majorelle

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- Bahia Palace
- Jardin Majorelle
- Benchaâbane gardens
- Menara Garden
- Arset Moula Abdessalam
- Jnane Harti
- Le Jardin Secret
- Saffron plantation
- Nectarome
- Anima

DAY 1 Fly to Marrakech with a transfer to the five-star Es Saadi Gardens & Resort Palace. Enjoy an **exclusive welcome drinks reception** and a **guided tour of the gardens**.

DAY 2 After breakfast, we visit **El Bahia Palace**, which has rooms opening out onto sunlit courtyards planted with cypress, orange trees and jasmine, and furnished with wells and fountains. We then walk to the 16th-century **El Badi Palace**, which is decorated in marble and gold. We finish the morning at the famous **Jardin Majorelle**. Composed and coloured like a painting, many of the garden's structures are painted a rich blue. Water is a prominent feature of the garden, with channels, lily-filled ponds and fountains, and surrounded by a wide range of plants. In the afternoon we pay a short visit the Musée Yves Saint Laurent, then drive to the expansive **gardens of Abderrazzak Benchaâbane**, a renowned garden designer, botanist, perfume maker and publisher.

DAY 3 We head to the tranquil **Menara Garden**, which has its origins in a 12th-century orchard of palm, olive and fruit trees. We take a stroll around **Cyber Parc Arset Moulay Abdessalam**. Once a space for souk artisan parties, it now offers eight hectares of lush tranquillity. We continue to **Jnane Harti**, known for its exotic plants. After lunch (not included), we visit the Dar el Bacha palace, then designer Tom Stuart-Smith's **Le Jardin Secret**, a garden that has been the home of important political figures. We then head to the artisan quarter to visit the workshops of dyers, tinsmiths, leather makers and wood painters, ending the afternoon with a guided walk around the vibrant square of Jemaa El Fna.

DAY 4 We drive into the Atlas Mountains to visit Ourika Valley's organic and aromatic gardens, including **Nectarome**, for a guided tour, and a **saffron plantation**. After lunch (included), we head to **Anima**, a contemporary garden combining plants and indigenous African art.

DAY 5 Return flight to London.

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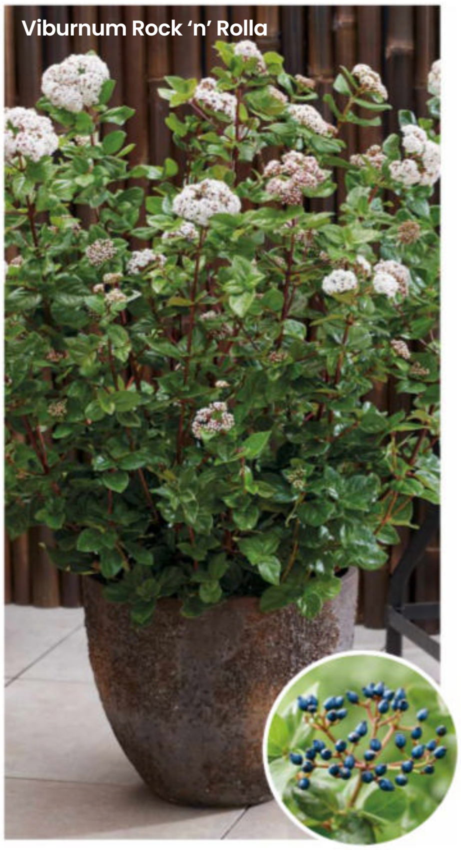

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GWHY

STEP BY STEP Repot cymbidiums

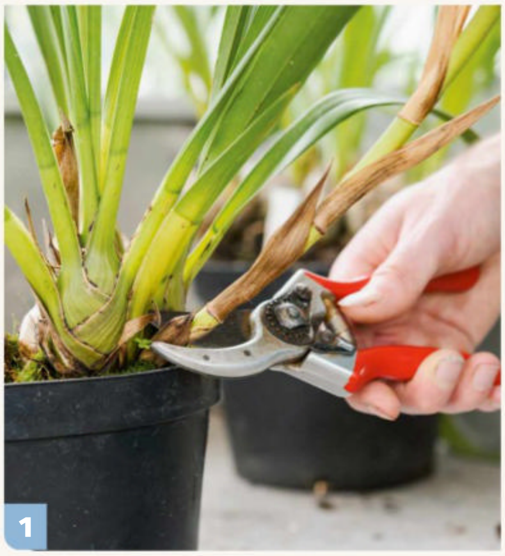
Repot cymbidiums after flowering. Do this every two years to keep them in good condition. If the roots have filled the pot, divide them into several pieces. Look after your plant by watering with rainwater and giving it a weak liquid feed once a week. Put cymbidiums outside in the shade for the summer and leave them out for a few chilly nights in autumn to initiate flowering for next year.

1 TRIM back the old flowering stems. The stem emerges from the base of a swollen pseudobulb, so follow it down as low as you can. Snip off faded or dead leaves and remove debris from between the bulbs.

2 HOLD the plant carefully at the base while pulling off the pot. Inspect the roots and trim any that are white, papery and dry, or are too long to easily move into the next pot.

3 REMOVE loose debris and note where the compost reached the pseudobulbs in its old pot. It needs to be planted at the same level or a little deeper when potted.

4 HOLD the plant in a pot 10cm wider than the rootball and keep it at the level it was previously growing while you fill around the roots and up the sides with orchid compost. Dress the surface with loose bark.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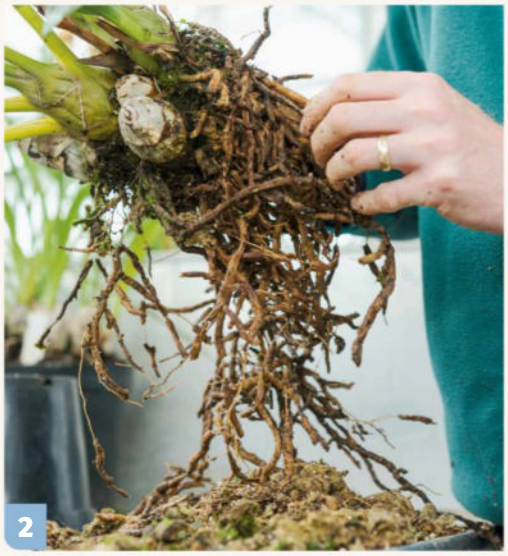
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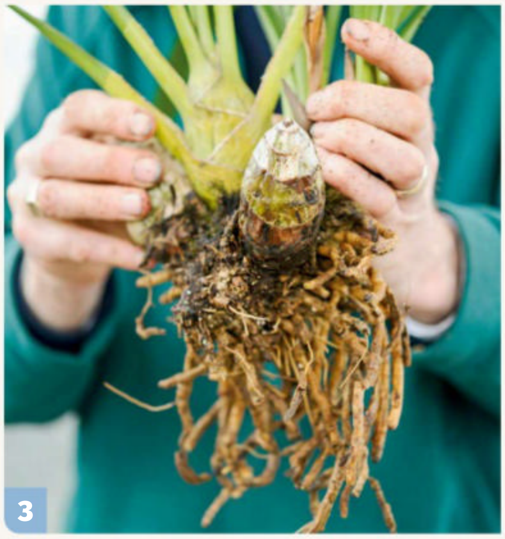
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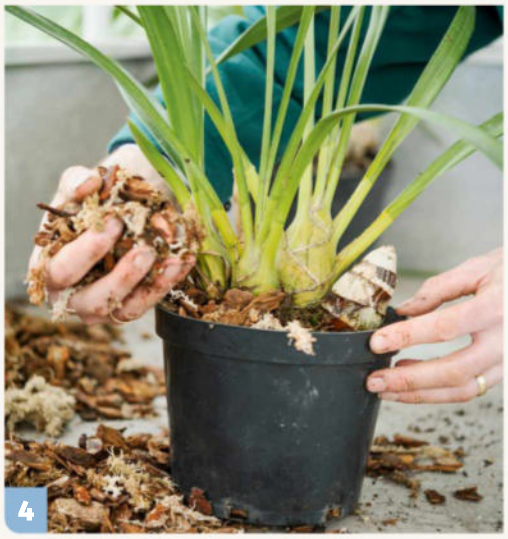
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30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Make a feature of your cacti and succulents by planting them in an open terrarium, which suits plants that like a dry environment. Add a 3cm layer of grit in the terrarium, followed by a 5cm layer of cactus compost. Sit the plants on top of the compost, add a 5cm layer of grit, then water the plants sparingly.

When pots match their surroundings, the plants take centre stage

Colour match your pots

Design your house-plant display by using pot covers that complement your style and decor. Be bold with them: they have great impact when used in pairs and groups. Glazed ceramics have a range of colours, while lined woven baskets give a rustic effect.

Be mindful of the practicalities. Make sure there is at least a finger's-width gap between the pot cover and the pot the plant is growing in. This helps when lifting the plant out when checking for watering or the weekly inspection for dead leaves or damage.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Feed house plants weekly, adding the feed to the watering can before you water**
- ☐ **Turn hanging plants around every couple of weeks to ensure even growth**
- ☐ **Add stakes to large house plants that are leaning and in danger of toppling over**
- ☐ **Move struggling plants to a new, more suitable location in the house**
- ☐ **Use a damp cloth to wipe dust from thick-leaved house plants**

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

Fully engage with your garden to enjoy the range of sounds, textures and scents that it contains

PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

Stop. Relax. Enjoy

May is one of the busiest months of the gardening calender, but, says **Ashley Edwards**, slowing things down to observe and appreciate your plot – flaws and all – will pay dividends

> “It’s when we stop and **take it all in** that we feel the true benefits of **being outdoors**”

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Strategically placed seating will encourage you to sit back and appreciate everything in your garden

Gardening can often seem like an endless job list, with seasonal tasks piling up. Perhaps you've been seduced by the latest garden catalogue and are only now realising that your towering stack of seed packets must all be sown within the next few weeks. Maybe that bramble seedling you took your eye off for five minutes is now knocking at the patio door, asking to be let in. Whatever the size of your outdoor space, there's something to be done at every turn, so it's no surprise that at times we can feel overwhelmed.

It's important to focus on arriving in the garden as a human being, not doing. It's when we stop and take it all in that we feel the true benefits of being outdoors. Of course, weeding, raking leaves and sweeping pathways can all be therapeutic and satisfying in their own ways, but when we're mindful of our environment, we can also cultivate a sense of calm.

Have you ever been in the garden, furiously weeding or cutting back perennials, when suddenly a huge bumblebee hums overhead and lands on a nearby flower? You stop to watch it clumsily tumbling around in the centre of the flower, getting coated with pollen in the process. In this moment, you are totally drawn in by this insect, while it is oblivious to your observations and goes about its business. You are completely present, fascinated, fixated, and a smile spreads across your face. You are reminded that we are all part of an infinite web of life, connected in every way. This is mindfulness.

Mindfulness has become a bit of a buzzword in the commercial world and is applied to almost every area of our lives without embodying any true meaning. Off-the-shelf products are 'mindfully crafted', processed convenience foods are part of a 'mindful diet', mass-produced fashion labels have 'mindful collections'. Unlike these commercialised forms of mindfulness, gardening and being outdoors is free, and doesn't require you to buy any special product to experience the true meaning of mindfulness. It's simply about slowing down, engaging your senses, and being open to your environment.

As gardeners, we already have a deep, intuitive connection to nature. We can cultivate this natural wonderment into a calming practice. It might sound counterintuitive to slow down, but what if we gave ourselves permission to enjoy our garden tasks, rather than just getting

> *“It's simply about slowing down, engaging your senses and being open to your environment”*

PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

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through them? That could be observing a flower up close, listening to birdsong or feeling the texture of soil in your hands. It also pays to be mindful about your movement when carrying out tasks. Feel the stretching of your body, try shifting weight in your feet, steadying your breathing and engaging your core muscles – moving mindfully can help prevent straining or pulling muscles as well as keep you present.

Accepting and adapting

We've all experienced the unpredictability of the garden, but can we reflect on this in a mindful way? Some years our dahlias have dinner-plate-sized blooms, while in other years they'll be completely decimated by slugs before they form even a single bud. By accepting that we can't predict these variables with any degree of certainty, we remain adaptable. Gardening is often about practicing adaptability, which goes hand in hand with being mindful.

We learn patience through gardening. Seeds take weeks to germinate while bulbs take months to bloom. But when they do erupt in all their splendour, we realise that the wait was worth it. Accepting that nature has its own rhythm is an important part of gardening mindfully. Rather than striving for instant results, we can garden for the long term and see it as an investment. A good example of this would be planting a small sapling rather than a large tree, and experiencing the joy of seeing it grow tall and proud. The Greek proverb: "A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit" springs to mind, and this certainly doesn't need to be restricted solely to old

> *"Accepting that nature has its own rhythm is an important part of gardening mindfully"*

With myriad colours, shapes, sounds and scents, the garden provides stimulants for all the senses

How to garden mindfully

Put the idea of mindful gardening into practice with these techniques, whether you have a few minutes to spare or a lot more...

■ 5 minutes

Abandon your shoes at the door! Step onto the cool grass and take three deep breaths. Imagine yourself rooted in place like a great tree. This will give you an awareness of your body and its connection to the environment. Grounding can reduce cortisol levels, helping to reduce stress and anxiety, and improve overall wellbeing.

■ 30 minutes

Focus on a small area of your garden that you want to work on. Stay aware of your posture, breathing and movement while carrying out tasks. Try not to let your mind wander but stay in the moment. If you find yourself negatively judging your work or the appearance of the area, try to embrace the imperfections rather than strive for an unattainable ideal.

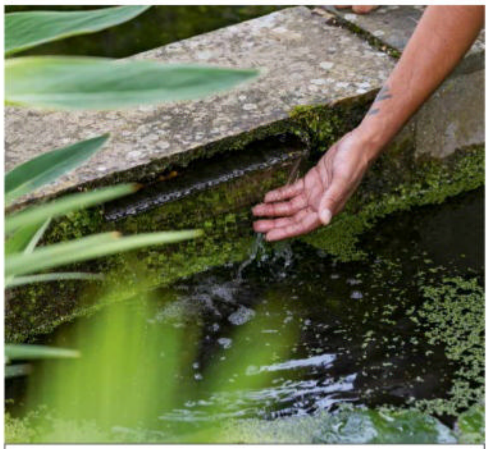
■ 1hr+

Take a gentle stroll around your garden engaging all your senses and trying not to focus on tasks that need completing. If you find your mind drifting to your to-do list, that's fine, just bring your attention back to your surroundings without making judgement.

- **Sight** Notice the colours of flowers, shadows cast by trees and insects moving around plants.
- **Sound** Listen to the gentle rustle of leaves in the wind, the uplifting song of birds or the subtle hum of insects.
- **Smell** Even if you don't have scented plants, breathe deeply and notice the scent in the air. If you have herbs, crush leaves between your fingers and breath in the aroma.
- **Touch** Run your fingers between the fissures of bark or find a spongy mound of moss to press against.
- **Taste** If you grow edibles, pick and taste them, noticing the subtle flavours.

By engaging all of your senses you will cultivate a mindful presence and, in turn, build a deeper appreciation of your garden.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH



Create a more peaceful garden

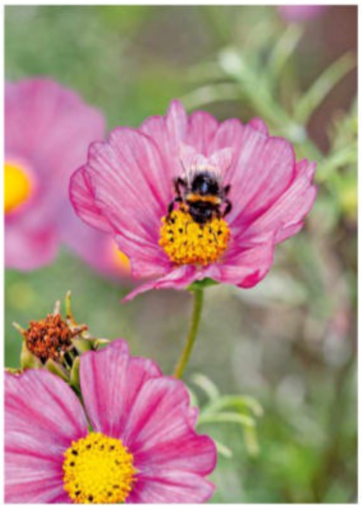
Follow these simple steps to make your garden a restful place to be

- **Add year-round interest** This will encourage you to be in the garden, even in the colder seasons. Seeing early-flowering plants such as snowdrops and hellebores can act as a beacon of hope in the depths of winter. Winter-flowering plants often have the added bonus of being scented.
- **Build a water feature** The sound of running water is instantly soothing and will encourage wildlife into your garden. Light reflecting on the surface of water is mesmerising and can enhance a space.
- **Create privacy** You don't want to feel overlooked by neighbours when trying to relax. Clever use of trees and shrubs can provide screening. Keep hedges to a reasonable height, so you feel secluded but not trapped. Hedges can also be used to filter out unwanted noise and pollution.
- **Use natural materials** This will harmonise the garden with its surroundings. Gardening sustainably encompasses working with nature, not against it. You can't ground yourself on artificial lawn.
- **Declutter your garden** This will create a sense of calm and space to focus. Sometimes less is more – a simple repetitive planting scheme with cool colours will give your space a touch of serenity.
- **Think about a view from your window** Looking out onto your garden can be almost as effective for your wellbeing as actually being outdoors.
- **Allow for exploration** Having a pathway to lead you around the garden to where you can stop and sit at a bench or admire a view makes an intentional space. Gentle winding pathways that create a loop are satisfying to follow.
- **Focus on sensory plants** Engaging your senses is central to mindfulness, so include plants that will stimulate you.

Celebrate the beauty and transience of cherry blossom

men! Mindfulness can help us to consider the greater environment and our impact on it.

Nature is cyclical and, as gardeners, we can tune into these gentle rhythms. A plant that, to me, embodies mindfulness is the ornamental cherry blossom. In Japan, these trees are revered and the tradition of Hanami – gathering under the blossom to appreciate their fleeting beauty – is a common practice. The stunning sight of blossom causes us to stop and observe. Their impermanence reminds us to appreciate the here and now, cherishing what we have. The inevitable falling of the petals teaches us acceptance. Nothing lasts forever and we must work with nature rather than resist its cycles.



A rewarding part of gardening is observing wildlife at work

Joy of reality

We often have romantic expectations of what a garden should look like. Perhaps we see only the best parts of someone's garden on their social media page, acres of public gardens tended by many hands, or the visually lovely but practically unrealistic gardens at big flower shows. The garden teaches us to let go of perfection. If we fail, we can try again next year.

Remember, the joy of gardening is that we can experiment and learn. How do different colour combinations make you feel? Which plants thrive in what conditions? Does chilli powder deter squirrels, or does it make the tulip bulbs tastier? Gardens don't always go to plan, but that's one of life's big lessons. Mindfulness helps us to adapt and accept our flaws.

Perhaps the most powerful thing I've learnt from gardening mindfully is gratitude: how grateful I am to witness little miracles every day just by slowing down and observing the world around me. ☐

> *“Gardens don't always go to plan. Mindfulness helps us to adapt and accept our flaws”*

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/OLGA DEBROVOLSKA; NEIL HEPWORTH

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Drought-tolerant aloes wait patiently for autumn rains

Garden globetrotting: *Western Cape*

A plant paradise for botanical enthusiasts, the Western Cape is home to countless species – although it was the wild succulents that caught **Emma Crawforth's** attention during her recent visit

Emma Crawforth
Horticultural Editor

There's a reason why the Cape Floristic Region is a target destination for plant lovers and gardeners alike: this is the smallest (by area) of the six Floral Kingdoms in the world but has over 9,000 vascular plant species. So, what does that mean?

Botanists have divided the globe into six geographical areas, according to the type of plants growing in each. While the Cape Floristic Region covers only the Southern tip of South Africa and a little bit of Namibia, the huge Holarctic Floral Kingdom (in which the United Kingdom sits) includes almost the whole of the Northern Hemisphere. The Cape is renowned for plant diversity and endemics (which means plants that aren't native anywhere else).

I visited the region in early autumn, when much of the ground was parched after summer and thirstily waiting for autumn rains. This was a great time to see how the region's famous succulents cope without irrigation, using ancient adaptations to stay alive. I was also treated to some beautiful native plants at their best – the rich blues of *Felicia amelloides* and *Salvia chamelaeagnea*, the charismatic orange bells of *Cotyledon orbiculata* and bursting out of their bulbs, pink *Amaryllis belladonna*. Completely new to me was a flowering grass that seemed to sparkle in the low morning and evening light – *Melinis repens*.

The highlight of my trip was a visit to the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden. I went with two South African botanists, who are based at the gardens of Babylonstoren, in the Franschhoek wine valley, and The Newt, a hotel in Somerset.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/BLICKWINKEL/M WOIKE; EMMA CRAWFORTH

Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden offers fascination all year round

They identified wild succulents I'd only ever seen in houseplant collections or European public garden displays before. Each plant had a survival story, from conserving energy by not photosynthesizing to waiting for rain to expand their seedpods and release the seed onto receptive moist ground. If you're quiet there you can spot rock rabbits, klipspringer (tiny antelopes), lizards and the desert chamaeleon.

This was also a tasting experience, with the botanists (Ernst and Cornell) picking and handing me fruits to try, from sour fig or *Carpobrotus edulis* (salty and sweet), Kei apple or *Dovyalis afra* (fleshy, refreshing and sweet-sour) plus the crossberry or *Grewia occidentalis* (a sweet pulp around large seeds you don't swallow). Ernst and Cornell are building a Cape-flora garden at this month's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, so were keen to demonstrate these wild fruits, but I also ate seasonal home-grown delights such as grapes, figs and melon back at my hotel.

While the spring superblooms featuring carpets of millions of wildflowers are famous in South Africa's Cape, there are flowers to see all year round in this region of extreme biological diversity and beautiful open skies.

■ ESSENTIAL INFO

The South African seasons are the opposite to us here in the UK – so it's summer in the Western Cape when it's winter in the UK. With this in mind, botanical highlights can often been seen during our autumn and the Cape's spring and early summer. It's peak tourist time over the Christmas period, so avoid this time if you can.

*I stayed at Babylonstoren, Paarl (**babylonstoren.com**). The Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden is open 365 days a year 7am to 6pm – entry is R800 per adult.*

Inspired by the Western Cape

If you'd like to bring a taste of South Africa to your garden here in the UK, there are lots of plants you can grow. Here are my top choices, all suitable for growing at home providing you pay a little attention to cold weather and hardiness ratings

Grow this long-flowering African daisy in pots for flowers in the UK from June through to October

FELICIA AMELLOIDES

These daisy bushes, with flowers the colour of a sunny African sky, bloom for months on end, so although they are a little tender (only hardy down to around -2°C) you'll get blooms for a whole summer. Plant in large pots (each bush reaches around 60cm x 60cm). This species is at home growing on coastal sand dunes so do plant in free-draining soil or compost and position in full sun.

AMARYLLIS BELLADONNA

Called the March lily in South Africa, this beauty is autumn-flowering so in the Northern Hemisphere you'll get the huge blooms in August to October. Plant the bulbs in spring, in a sunny spot. They are hardy down to around -7°C so you can leave them in the ground to overwinter in most parts of the UK. The scented flowers attract butterflies, bees and moths.

SALVIA CHAMELAEAGNEA

Part of a naturalistic planting scheme close to my hotel room, this striking salvia emitted a lovely scent which filled the air each evening. Quite new to the market in the UK it's best to treat it like a Mexican salvia and take precautions against cold winters until more is known about its hardiness here. Its blue and white blooms on stems up to 90cm tall would combine beautifully with the amaryllis and felicia for an early-autumn Cape-style display.

Known as rough blue sage, this delicate beauty flowers in the UK from July to October

Bring late colour to your plot with the March lily, which has large scented flowers

PHOTOS: EMMA CRAWFORTH

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PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

GREENHOUSE GROWING

Alan shares his greenhouse know-how, with advice on what to grow now and which kit is essential for success

As spring gets into her stride – and May is a month which, regardless of the weather, is most definitely at the heart of spring – so the greenhouse becomes a powerhouse of activity. It also offers welcome shelter from unseasonably windy days, downpours and generally inclement weather. The one thing we're assured of at this time of year are the lengthening hours of daylight – guaranteed to give plants a growth spurt and make life a whole lot brighter.

I love May and June; they are the months when promises are fulfilled. While April is capricious in the extreme, May will generally offer more settled weather and June is a month that can be guaranteed free of frosts in all but the most northern counties.

That means that much of what has been grown and raised in the greenhouse can be ferried outside, freeing up space for a new season of flower, fruit and vegetables. Hold on to your hat, the growing season is up and running at full tilt!

Managing temperatures

You might think that these are the months where the greenhouse becomes less vital – with rising temperatures do plants really need the protection it offers? The answer is that while the contents of your greenhouse might change, it is still a hugely enjoyable and useful garden structure in spring and summer.

While tender bedding plants that have been raised under cover might be making their way into the great outdoors, the space they free up is now available for a different range of plants – either fruit and vegetable crops or ornamental container plants.

Reducing temperatures becomes more important than heating from now on, and if your structure is not fitted with sufficient ventilators then overheating will be a problem. Plants dry out at the roots, wilt and scorch in the fierce rays of the sun so if you are buying a new greenhouse, do bear this in mind. Both side and roof ventilators are necessary to ensure a through flow of air which will help to

Make space in the greenhouse by moving tender crops outside

Penny's Greenhouse

> “The greenhouse can be a hugely **enjoyable** and **useful** garden structure in spring and summer”

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> “Greenhouse tomatoes will always crop more reliably than those that are grown outside”

prevent temperatures rising. Added to this, some sort of shading will be necessary.

Pests and diseases tend to multiply more rapidly in warm weather and bright light, so if you notice an outbreak of greenfly, red spider mite or whitefly act quickly to keep these pests in check. Fungal diseases thrive in stagnant air so adequate ventilation is vital in reducing their incidence.

Arranging your plants

It’s round about now that you will be able to gauge how effective the staging in your greenhouse is – assuming that it is equipped with staging rather than having a soil border down each side. If that is the case then tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers and the like can be planted directly in the soil once it has been enriched with some soil improver. It’s not a bad idea to use the bagged proprietary kind in the greenhouse since it will be more reliably pest and disease free than well-rotted manure or garden compost, but if funds are short go for the latter rather than nothing at all

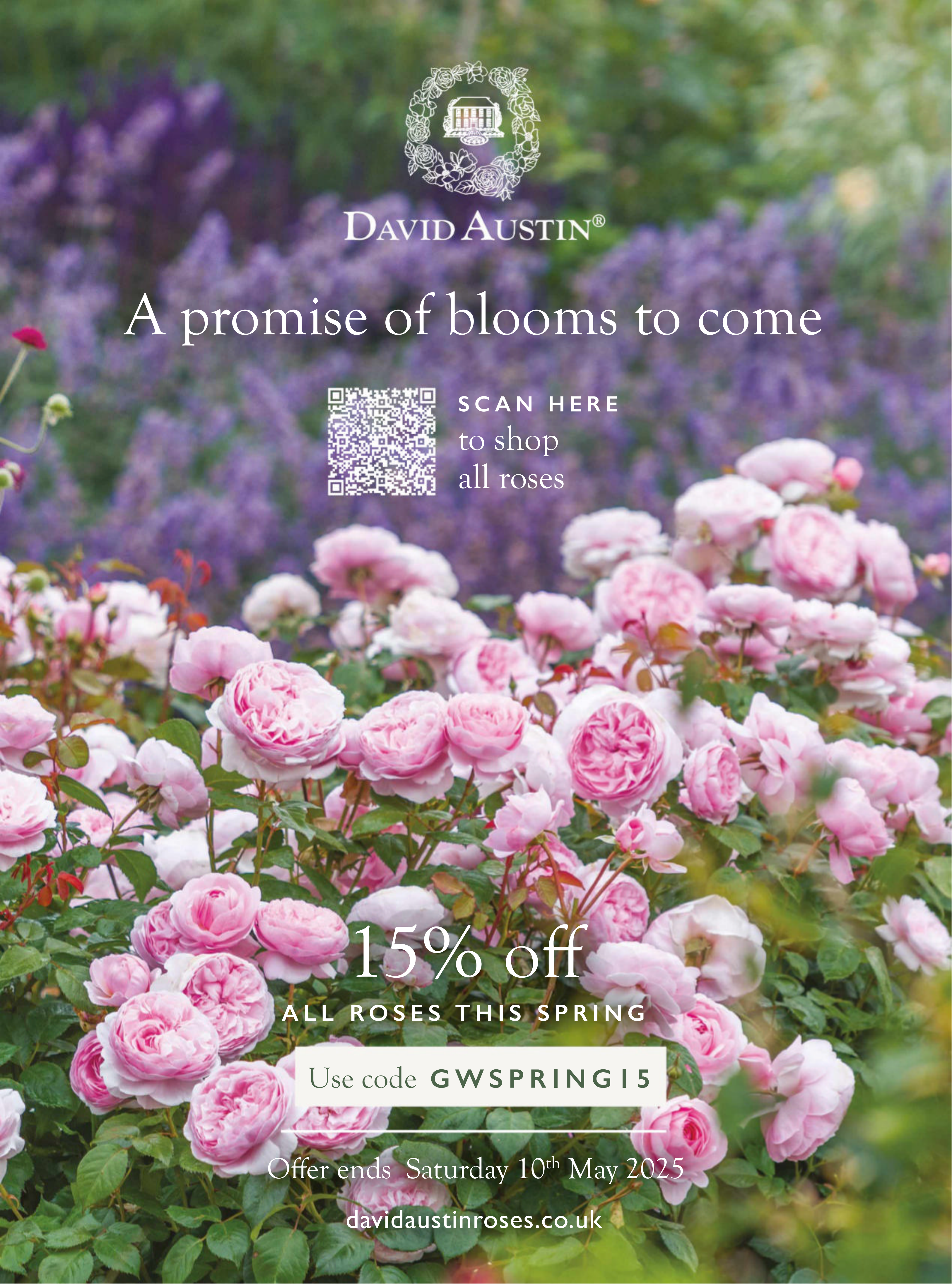
Greenhouse-grown tomatoes and the like will always crop more reliably, and in advance of, those that are grown outside. All too often a chilly summer will mean that tomatoes take an age to ripen and in humid spells outdoors they may fall prey to blight. Growing them under cover in a greenhouse will save you a lot of heartache.

The staging can be cleaned down and if it holds trays of gravel this can be washed with a hosepipe to give yourself, and your plants, a fresh start. No greenhouse ever has enough space and I make the most of my staging by setting up a tiered system of scaffolding planks supported on large, upturned flowerpots. I use 30cm-high pots at the back, 15cm-high pots in the middle and the staging itself at the front. In theory this does not increase the depth of the staging front to back, but by having each row at a different height, the fact that plants can spill over the edges does in reality increase the space available.

It also makes for a more impactful display where ornamental pot plants such as pelargoniums, streptocarpus, begonias and fuchsias are concerned. (When you are

TOP Water your tomatoes and other greenhouse plants as needed, checking them daily in warm weather
ABOVE Open greenhouse windows on hot days to help increase air flow and prevent attacks of fungal diseases

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH



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> *With rising temperatures you can find yourself a slave to the watering can and the ventilator*

raising seedlings in spring the fact that the trays can be placed high up nearer to the light also helps to prevent them from becoming tall and leggy.)

Some folk will say that you cannot grow tomatoes and cucumbers in the same greenhouse, or that they do not mix with ornamental pot plants. Nonsense! Those of us with a single greenhouse have to muck in and make it work. Fine if you can have a greenhouse devoted to one particular crop but unless you own a range of Victorian greenhouses that luxury will be denied you!

Essential kit

Watering will be a daily requirement at this time of year (selective – ministering only to those plants that need it) and in really hot weather, check over your plants morning and evening. You'll enjoy the calming atmosphere of a greenhouse and find it a great place to unwind at the end of the day.

However, with rising temperatures you can find yourself a slave to the watering can and the ventilator in May and June. Make life easier for yourself by at least investing in automatic ventilating arms on the ridge ventilators. These are operated by a cylinder of wax which, as it expands and contracts, will raise and lower the ventilator as the temperature rises and falls. They operate independently, without the aid of electricity, so any greenhouse, however remote from the house, can be fitted with them. A maximum and minimum thermometer is vital to enable you to check that the temperature in the greenhouse stays within an acceptable range, especially if you're out during the day when the sun is at its hottest.

Shading, at its simplest, may be a proprietary form of greenhouse whitewash, applied to the glass in May and washed off in late September. Better still, invest in exterior, or interior, blinds to diffuse the rays of the sun. The former are better since the sunlight is intercepted before it enters the greenhouse and so temperatures are likely to be more effectively controlled.

I've mentioned a way of creating space on the staging by using wooden planks to create tiers, but check if it's possible to fit narrow shelves above them along the sides of the greenhouse to offer even more space – useful for a single line of plants in pots or

ABOVE Open side vents in greenhouse windows to bring the temperature down on hot summer days
BELOW Check your greenhouse thermometer so you can gauge whether your greenhouse needs to be cooled down

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

for trays of seedlings. Try to make use of every last bit of space within the confines of your greenhouse. Even the area beneath the staging can be used for shade-loving tender ferns, *Begonia rex* and other plants that are happiest out of direct sunlight.

Wise watering

Watering is the thing that will occupy most of your time in the greenhouse during May and June. I happen to be one of those souls who enjoys watering by hand – with a long-spouted Haws watering can if I am not in a hurry, otherwise with a slow running hosepipe to make sure that the compost within the pot remains undisturbed.

If frequent absences mean that watering becomes haphazard you might want to invest in an automatic watering system which can take the form of capillary matting, from which the plants take up what they want, or a system of 'spaghetti' tubes fitted to a larger pipe which is connected to a computerised timer secured to the tap. But this last method is rather hit and miss in that plants are watered at a set frequency regardless of the state of the compost, which will dry out more rapidly in sunny weather than when the sky is overcast.

Overwatering rather than underwatering is a common problem. If you plan to be away for any length of time, get a friend or neighbour to minister to your plants rather than relying on a computer which cannot tell if compost is wet or dry. ☐

Use your greenhouse to grow seedlings until they're big enough to move outside

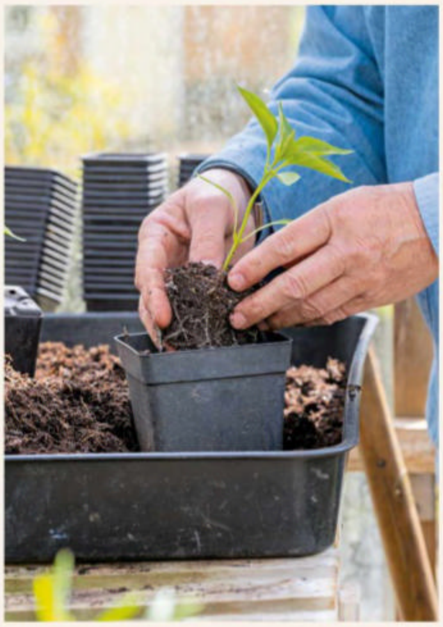
ALAN'S TIPS FOR GREENHOUSE GROWING

MAY

☐ **Ventilate** more during the day and accustom bedding plants to the great outdoors by taking them out of the greenhouse during the day, bringing them in at night if frosts threaten.
☐ **Check** every day to see if pot plants need watering.
☐ **Carry** on pricking out seedlings.
☐ **Pot up** rooted cuttings.
☐ **Set up** greenhouse shading to prevent overheating and sun scorch.
☐ **Act quickly** to control pests and diseases.
☐ **Sow melons**, cucumbers and salad crops.
☐ **Plant tomatoes**, cucumbers, peppers and aubergines that were sown earlier.
☐ **Pot on** pelargoniums and other plants that have outgrown their containers.
☐ **Take cuttings** of dahlias from boxed up tubers.
☐ **Feed pot** plants weekly from now on.

JUNE

☐ **Remove** sideshoots from tomatoes and feed them once a week.
☐ **Damp** down the floor of the greenhouse morning and evening.
☐ **Pot up** rooted dahlia cuttings.
☐ **Allow** cyclamen corms to dry off and rest for the summer.
☐ **Shading** can now be left in place rather than rolled up at night on all except the dullest days.
☐ **Sow pot** plants for cultivation in the greenhouse.
☐ **Take cuttings** of pelargoniums and other ornamentals.
☐ **Train tomatoes**, melons and cucumbers.
☐ **Feed** all pot plants once a week.
☐ **Leave** the greenhouse door open during the day.



Pot on seedlings of crops like chillies when they outgrow their containers

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

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‡ Other dates available between April and October 2025

Day timetable

- **DAY 1** Arrival in Malaga
- **DAY 2** Ronda
- **DAY 3** Seville
- **DAY 4** Free day in Seville
- **DAY 5** Córdoba
- **DAY 6** Granada & Alhambra
- **DAY 7** Return home

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- **Sample** delicious pintxos
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Rioja vineyards

Day timetable

- **DAY 1** Arrival in Bilbao
- **DAY 2** San Sebastián & free afternoon
- **DAY 3** Bayonne & La Rhune cog railway
- **DAY 4** Pamplona & Rioja winery
- **DAY 5** Burgos & free afternoon
- **DAY 6** Bilbao
- **DAY 7** Santillana Del Mar & Altamira cave museum
- **DAY 8** Return home

‡ Other dates available between April and October 2025

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Cordless self-propelled mowers

We tested each mower for ease of use, versatility and value for money

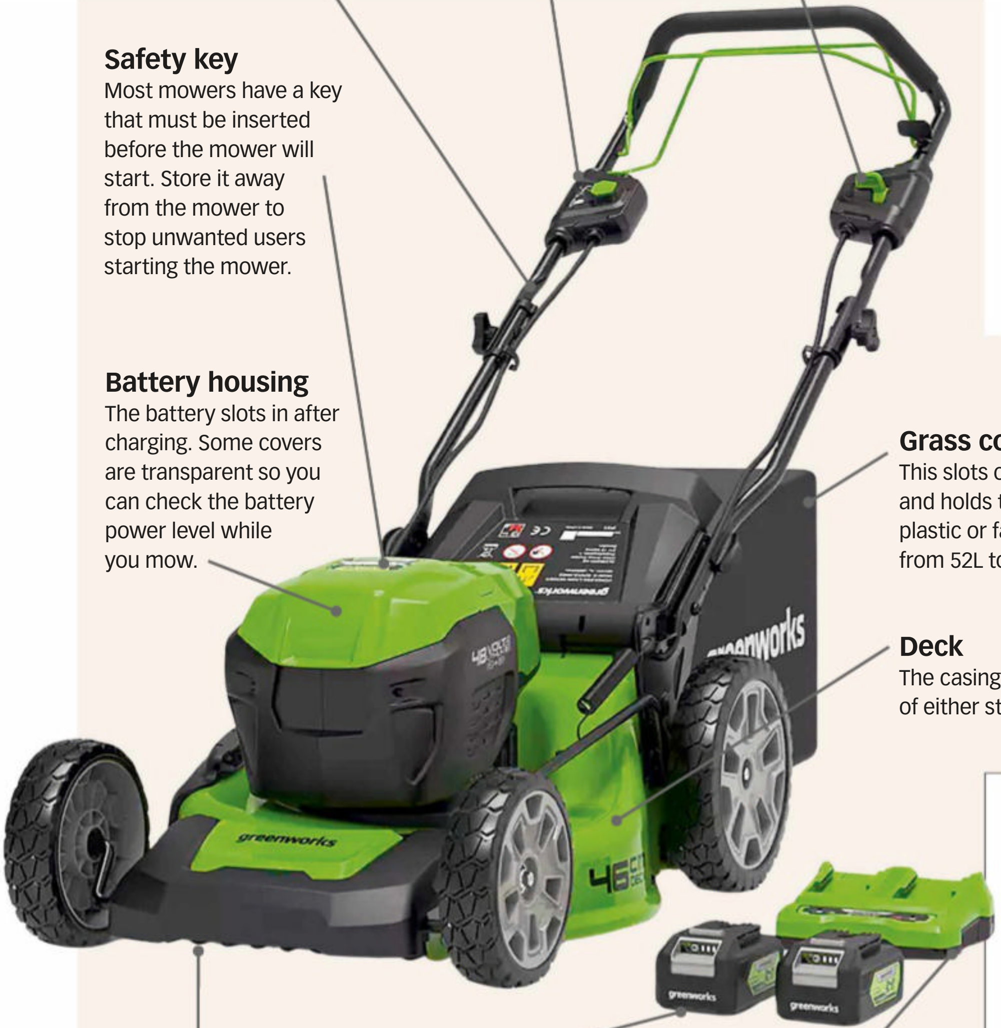
Self-propelled mowers make light work of lawns, even on slopes. Reviews Editor **Kay Maguire** puts seven to the test, to help you find the best choice for your garden

Mowing the lawn is a key job at this time of year when the grass is growing fast. If you have a large, complex or sloping garden and want to take the strain out of mowing, then a self-propelled lawn mower is the answer. These mowers offer an extra boost thanks to a drive bar on the handle that makes the mower move forward. You don't have to push it, just walk behind, guiding it where you want to go.

They are heavier than push mowers, but tend to be the larger mowers on the market with a wider cutting width. This makes them ideal for bigger lawns, saving you both time and effort. To see what you get for your money, we tested seven cordless self-propelled mowers, ranging in price from around £400 to over £900 (including battery and charger). They were all suitable for medium or large lawns and were unpacked, assembled and used to mow a range of grass and terrains. The following criteria were used to assess the mowers, with equal weight given to each:

- **Setup and storage** Assessed the ease of assembly and clarity of instructions, how simple the mower is to store and the battery charge time.
- **Handling** Looked at comfort and ease of use, handle height adjustment and how to change the height of cut, along with weight, noise levels and battery run time. Collection-bag size and material were also considered.
- **Mowing** Focused on cutting width, the range of cutting heights, and any features, such as speed control and mulching options.
- **Value for money** Considered all the above, as well as quality and design, warranty and the price, including battery and charger.

Self-propelled mowers explained



Controls
A simple push button and lever start the engine, then pulling the drive lever to the handle engages the blade.

Handle
May be adjustable to suit users of different heights – some mowers offer just a couple of options, others more. Cushioning helps to protect hands.

Speed control lever
Adjusts the speed to enable easy manoeuvring around the garden and up and down slopes.

Safety key
Most mowers have a key that must be inserted before the mower will start. Store it away from the mower to stop unwanted users starting the mower.

Battery housing
The battery slots in after charging. Some covers are transparent so you can check the battery power level while you mow.

Grass collector
This slots onto the back of the mower and holds the clippings. It can be either plastic or fabric, and capacity varies from 52L to 60L.

Deck
The casing for the cutting blade, made of either steel or lightweight plastic.

Cutting width
The deck width varies but narrower ones are easier to manoeuvre and better for smaller lawns, wider decks save time and are ideal for larger areas.

Battery
Available in a range of voltage (V) and ampere (Ah) sizes, which dictate the power and run time, and hence the area it will mow on a single charge.

Charger
Indicator lights show charging and when the batteries are fully charged. Fast chargers are often available at an extra cost.

Storage
For compact storage, the handles fold in half, and some fold down completely over the body of the mower, taking up even less space.

MOWERS IN PRICE ORDER

SCORE: 16/20

Greenworks 24V+24V lawn mower 46cm SP

£434.99

Cutting width 46cm
Weight 27.5kg
Battery size 48V (2 x 24V) 4Ah
Run time/area 480m^2 **Warranty** 3 years

Steel deck. Speed control, but slow. Seven cutting heights: 25-80mm. Mulching and side discharge options. 55L collection bag. Safety key. Folds for storage, but fiddly.

Pros & cons
✔ Comfortable, quiet and long run time
✔ Good value for the features
✔ Compatible with Greenworks 24V battery system
✘ Feels heavy, especially when changing the cutting height
✘ Fiddly to build and store

Setup/storage ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆
Mowing ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 14/20

Cobra MX 460S40V

£438.99

Cutting width 46cm
Weight 24kg
Battery size 40V 5Ah
Run time/area 51 minutes
Warranty 2 years

Three adjustable handle heights. Brushless motor. Seven cutting heights: 25-75mm. Grass bag assembly fiddly and needs screwdriver. Mulching and side discharge options. 60L collection bag. Safety key.

Pros & cons

✔ 3-in-1 grass collection choice
✔ Battery charge clearly visible on handle
✔ Compatible with Cobra 40V system
✘ Heavy, and handle is uncomfortable
✘ No speed control

Setup/storage ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆
Mowing ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 19/20

Worx Nitro WG749E 40V 46cm cordless self-propelled mower

£449.99

Cutting width 46cm
Weight 28.7kg
Battery size 40V (2 x 20V) 4Ah
Run time/area 40 minutes
Warranty 3 years (+2 years if registered)

No assembly, handle height easy to adjust. Brushless motor. Easy speed control. Seven cutting heights: 20-80mm. Mulching option. 55L bag. Safety key. Great value for features.

Pros & cons

✔ Battery power visible when you mow
✔ Cutting power adjusts to grass length
✔ Part of Worx 20V PowerShare system
✘ Collection bag fiddly to assemble
✘ Heavy

Setup/storage ★★★★★
Handling ★★★★☆
Mowing ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

SCORE: 17/20

Stiga Collector 48 S AE Kit

£455

Cutting width 46cm
Weight 25kg
Battery size 48V 5Ah
Run time/area 400m²
Warranty 5 years

Grass bag assembly is fiddly and needs screwdriver. Steel deck. Six cutting heights: 22-65mm. 60L grass bag. Space for spare battery. Safety key.

Pros & cons

✔ Anti-scalping feature
✔ Compatible with Stiga ePower 48V system
✔ Long warranty
✘ Long 220-minute charge time
✘ No speed control
✘ No mulching option

Setup/storage ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆
Mowing ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 18/20

Ego LM1702E-SP 42cm self-propelled mower (kit)

£619

Cutting width 42cm
Weight 24kg
Battery size 56V 4Ah
Run time/area 300m² **Warranty** 5 years

No assembly needed. Quick-release telescopic, adjustable handle. Speed control. Seven cutting heights: 20-80mm. LED headlights. 55L bag. Safety key. Battery compatible with other Ego Power+ tools.

Pros & cons

✔ Adjustable handle for different users
✔ Easy to handle and store
✔ Battery charge clearly visible as you mow
✘ Shorter run time and no mulching option
✘ Only available as a kit

Setup/storage ★★★★★
Handling ★★★★★
Mowing ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 17/20

Husqvarna LC 142iS with battery and charger

£659

Cutting width 42cm
Weight 23kg **Battery size** 36V 4Ah
Run time/area 500m² **Warranty** 2 years

Instructions not as clear as some. Choice of two handle heights. Seven cutting heights: 25-75mm. Carry handle. Folds flat for storage. 50L grass bag. Safety key. Mulching option available.

Pros & cons

✔ Compact and light to manoeuvre
✔ Energy-saving mode increases run time
✔ Compatible with Husqvarna 36V system
✘ No mulching plug included
✘ No speed control
✘ Smaller grass bag

Setup/storage ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆
Mowing ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 18/20

Stihl RMA 448 RV rear roller cordless mower

£919

Cutting width 46cm
Weight 28kg
Battery size 36V 5Ah
Run time/area 340m² **Warranty** 2 years

Ready to use, but 52L grass box fiddly to put together. Mono handle is easily adjustable and folds for storage. Speed control. Five cutting heights: 15-60mm. Mulching option. Space for spare battery. Carry handle.

Pros & cons

✔ Energy-saving mode increases run time
✔ Rear roller for stripes
✔ Easy to switch to mulching
✔ Low cutting height for neat finish
✔ Compatible with Stihl AK system
✘ Large, fiddly plastic grass box
✘ No safety key

Setup/storage ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★★
Mowing ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★☆

BEST BUY

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Best value

Worx Nitro WG749E 40V 46cm cordless self-propelled mower

£449.99

This easy-to-use mower needs no assembly and has a quick-release, collapsible handle so it's simple to store. It offers six easy-to-adjust cutting heights and simple speed control. A 40-minute run time makes it an excellent value choice.

Best for smaller gardens

Ego LM1702E-SP 42cm self-propelled mower (kit)

£619

A well thought out mower with a wide choice of cutting heights, an adjustable telescopic handle, vertical storage, and even headlights. Its 42cm cutting width and run time make it great for smaller or more complex lawns. The battery level is clearly visible as you mow.

Best for larger lawns

Stihl RMA 448 RV rear roller cordless mower

£919

The mono handle allows easy access to the grass box, adjusts in height and folds flat over the mower for storage. The five cutting heights offer a neat, tight clip and you can opt for mulching with the simple flick of a switch.

How to choose

Consider the following points to help you choose the self-propelled mower that's right for you

How do you mow?

For a short, sharp cut, look for a mower with a low cutting height. But if you don't have time to mow regularly, a higher cutting height will cope with longer grass. A rear roller will give you neat stripes, while a mulching option lets you mulch the clippings back on to the lawn.

Is it easy to use?

Some mowers are ready to go out of the box, but with most you'll need to attach the handle and put the grass box together. Plastic grass boxes can be trickier to assemble than fabric ones. It's useful to have a choice of handle heights and easily adjustable cutting heights, while a simple speed control switch makes it easier to operate and provides an added boost when you need it up slopes. Being able to opt for mulching the clippings with a simple switch on the Stihl mower was particularly helpful.

What's the battery charge and run time?

The lithium-ion batteries in our test vary from 36V, 40V and 48V to 56V, and from 4Ah and 5Ah, and these determine the cutting power and run time on a single charge. Some mowers use two batteries at the same time, while a couple have space for a spare battery if you need it. Although run time can vary depending on conditions, length of grass, etc, they are given here as either lawn size (m²) or in minutes as a guide. Match the run time to the size of your lawn and hopefully a single charge will last long enough to finish the job. Fast charge times will help you get mowing again quickly.

Is storage space limited?

If you lack room in the shed, check how far the handle folds and how easily. All the handles in our test can at least fold over the body, some double-fold completely flat, and a few can be stood up vertically. Some, such as the Stihl, the Worx and the Ego mowers have quick-release or telescopic handles to make compacting down the mower quick and easy. Fabric grass collectors can be made flat for storage, while plastic grass boxes fold down or come apart for storage, but take up more room. Check the weight and carry handles of a mower if you need to lift it up steps.

Make sure the battery run time is sufficient for the size of your lawn

What do you get for your money?

All the mowers in our test include the battery and charger, but many are also available solo, without either. If you already own the right battery and charger, that will save you money, plus if the mower is part of a brand's battery system, you'll be able to buy further tools for less.

Mowers with brushless motors are powerful, efficient and longer lasting, which should be more economical and less wasteful.

Finally, warranty length varies from two to five years in our test, and some brands offer a longer warranty if registered. Warranty length may be different for the mower, battery and charger.

Where to buy

- **Cobra** cobragarden.co.uk
- **Ego** egopowerplus.co.uk
- **Greenworks** greenworkstools.co.uk
- **Husqvarna** husqvarna.com/uk
- **Stiga** stiga.com/uk
- **Stihl** stihl.co.uk
- **Worx** uk.worx.com

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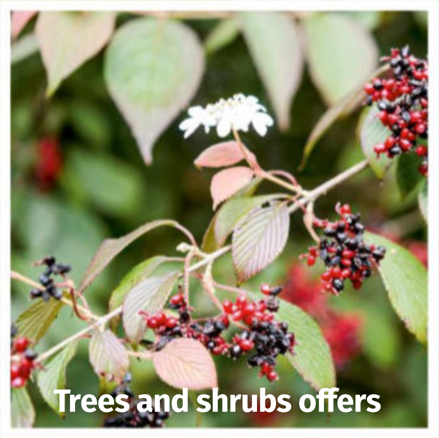

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A garden *at the* edge *of the* world

Having built his garden from scratch, author Patrick Gale shares the challenges he faces having one of England's most westerly walled rose gardens and the plants he holds dearest

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

Patrick and his husband carved their romantic-styled garden from a concrete farmyard

Patrick Gale, Penzance, Cornwall

"We have the sea on two sides of us and you get five types of weather every day"

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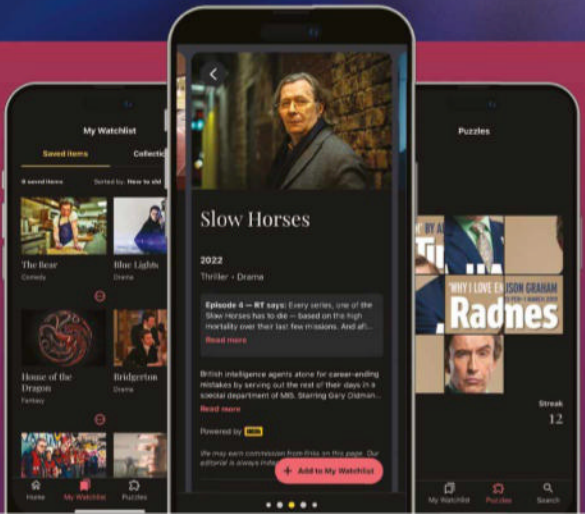
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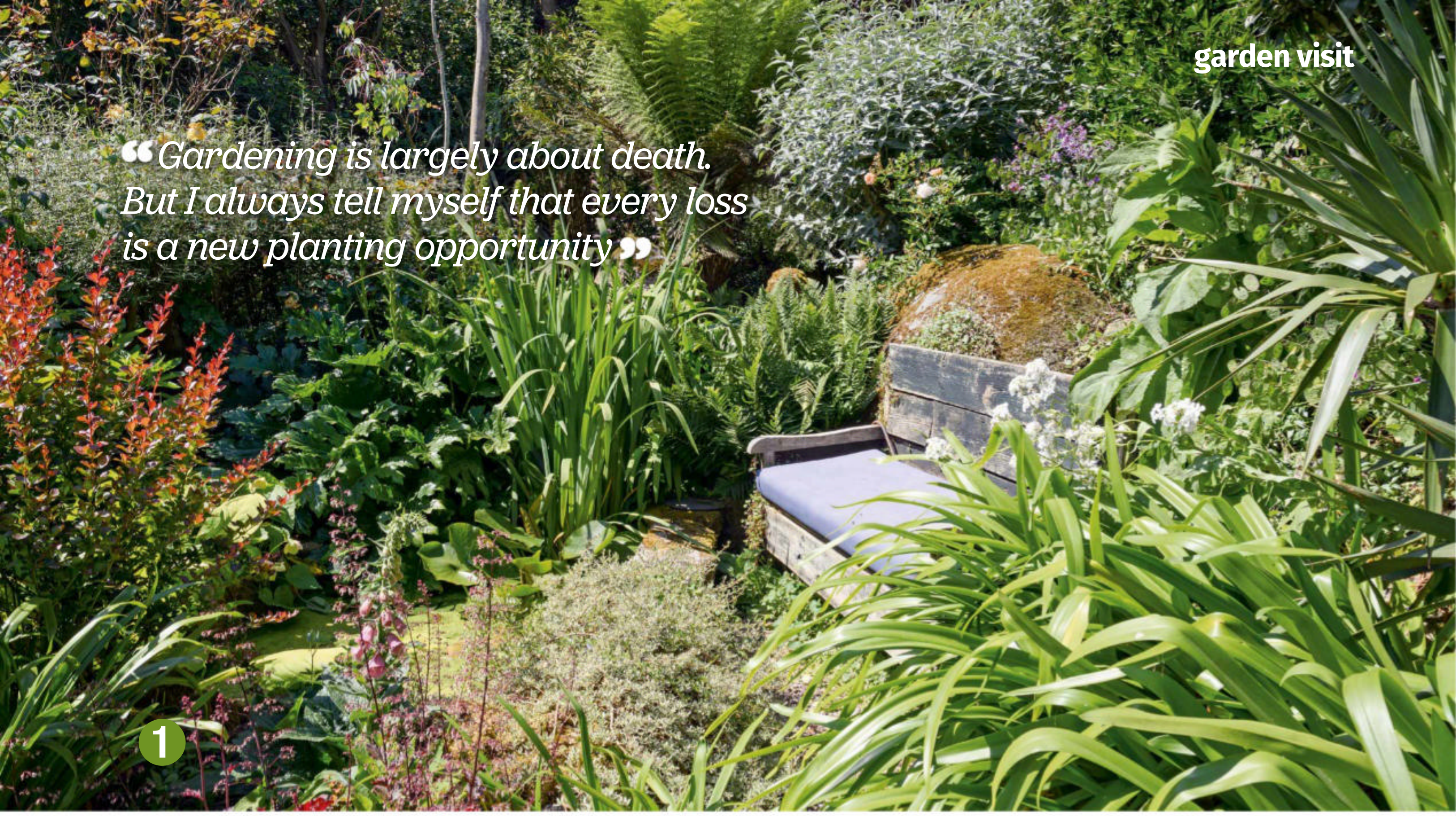
> “Gardening is largely about death. But I always tell myself that every loss is a new planting opportunity”



Tucked away on the rugged coast of Cornwall, novelist Patrick Gale has spent the past 25 years transforming a windswept farmyard into a lush, vibrant garden. Sheltered by towering windbreaks and filled with roses, salvias and Mediterranean plants, his garden is both a testament to resilience and a deeply personal retreat.

How would you describe your garden?

Our garden, Trevilley, is just under an acre in size. I've gradually taken over a large part of the farmyard, which is now part of the garden. The biggest challenge here, though, is that the soil near Land's End is only about 5in deep before you hit a layer of compacted subsoil and then solid granite. Because of this, most of the garden consists of raised beds.

All the flowerbeds have been created by rolling boulders along with a tractor and then piling up earth behind them, or by building artificial beds using shuttered concrete. If big things like trees thrive here, they tend to do so after about five or six years of us wondering whether they're going to die or not!

The wind is the biggest challenge here, as it's almost constant, either from one direction or another. So, our first priority was creating windbreaks. In fact, I could probably write a book on them – what works, what doesn't and what stands up to the relentless wind. Almost by accident, this has led us to plant a lot of species from New Zealand. We have plenty of olearia, elaeagnus and similar hardy evergreens. We have learnt to love them as they provide protection for more delicate things, for which having such protection is the only way they will survive.

What lessons have you learnt from these gardening challenges?

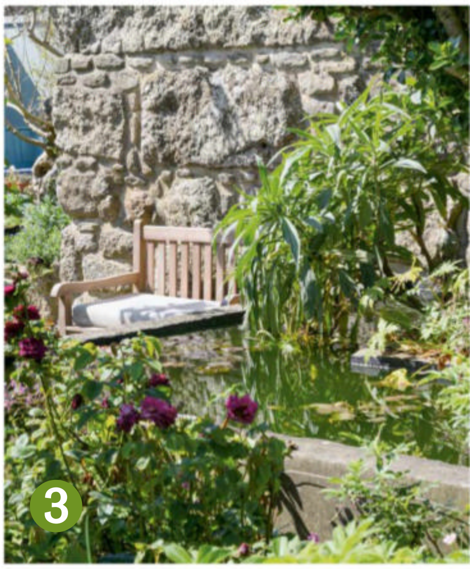
Every spring, you will find something that didn't make it through the winter, and you just have to learn to propagate, fill the gaps and regard every death as a planting opportunity. I've had to accept that some things will never happen. I have lots of plants on my wish list,such as *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the giant Himalayan lily. They cost a fortune, and I've tried them two or three times, but they will simply never do well here. Our soil just isn't what they like; what we have is pretty much ground granite and sand.

What I've done instead is to learn from weeds. I always tell beginner gardeners to not just

① Patrick uses boulders and trees to provide sheltered areas for plants that need wind protection

② Tolerant of tough coastal conditions, plants like Mexican fleabane do well in Trevilley

③ Seating is provided near roses Wild Rover and Rhapsody in Blue so people can enjoy their fragrance



Thanks to its mild climate, a wide variety of plants thrive in Trevilley

pull up all the weeds, but also to find out what the weeds are and research who their cousins are, because almost every weed in England has got some better-behaved cousins that are lovely. If you have, say, speedwell coming up a lot, other members of its family (*Veronica*) will do well too. Speedwell is one of our local weeds so I grow different kinds. We also get lots of wild spurge, so I very quickly learned to love euphorbias, which are part of the Euphorbiaceae family.

How difficult has it been to grow your rose garden?

To start with, we didn't have roses and there wasn't the shelter for them. We had to build a 2.5m-high wall that would shelter the rose garden from the rest of the farmyard. My husband, who trained as an architect, designed a series of beds for the roses. I then weighed in because I'm very bossy about colour, so now we have a kind of colour wheel of roses, going from deep purple, through pinks to almost black.

There is a theory that roses don't grow in Cornwall. I think it is just a myth because roses do like it here, but you have to discover which varieties will do well. Anyone who gardens by the sea will quickly discover that any *Rosa rugosa* will thrive – they can even grow in sand dunes. We have quite a few of those, but we've also discovered that there are some roses that are much tougher than others when it comes to dealing with the wind. The thing we'll never have, though, is the Kiftsgate-style, 9m-high rose arches. Our roses get up to about 1.5m, then they start to shiver and go brown.

I live in hope, though, and I'm discovering that you can work very well with surrounding trees that form a windbreak. I've got a few big roses that I've trained up trees, including a 'Paul's Himalayan Musk' that's now about 7.5m.

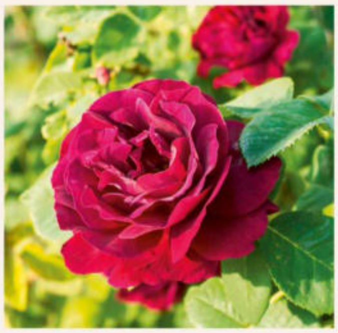
Could you tell us how you use pots in your garden?

Many people who visit Trevilley are rather amazed at how much container gardening goes on here. I have lots of pots and most of them I take indoors for the winter.

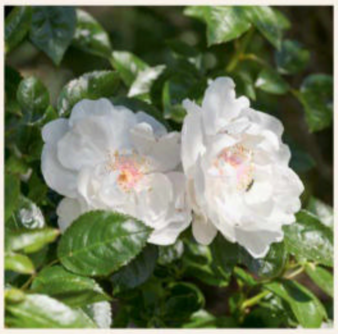
We have geraniums and lots of succulents, which I love growing in pots. The beauty with that is that you can, in effect, remake your garden every year by putting the pots in different places. They're like a collection. When I visit other gardens, I love looking for different geraniums and succulents such as sedums, which I haven't yet got. I do swaps with the gardeners so I can add to my collection.

Patrick's favourite roses

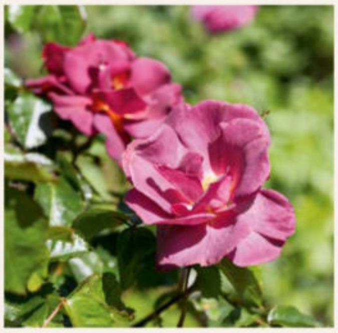
There's a rose for every garden. Patrick lists his favourite varieties to grow and why he loves them



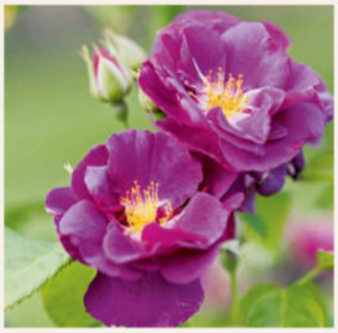
- **'Souvenir du Docteur Jamain'** A dark-purple climber that thrives against a north-facing wall.



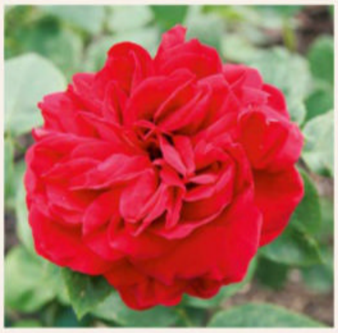
- **'Jacqueline du Pré'** A pale rose that looks like a water lily. A very decorative, bee-friendly, semi-double flower.



- **Wild Rover** This variety is a subtle shade of mauve and has a fantastic scent.



- **Rhapsody in Blue** A fragrant rose that pairs beautifully with Wild Rover.



- **L.D. Braithwaite** a knock-out red rose that looks like a child's idea of how a rose should be.

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■ **DAY 3** Start the day at **Floors Castle**, the largest inhabited castle in Scotland. Time for lunch (not included), before we travel to **Monteviot Gardens**, which surround the early 18th-century lodge.

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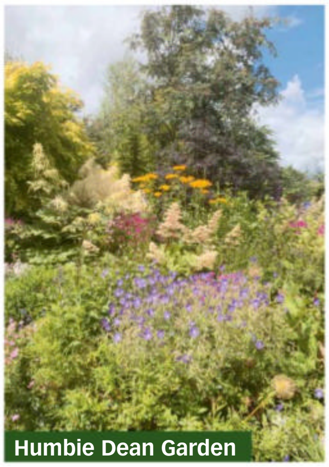
This tour has been graded as moderate, involving a large amount of walking, with little or no access to assistance. Please bear this in mind when booking.



Humbie Dean Garden

Dawyck Estate

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I've inherited from my mother a lovely collection of really tiny Victorian flowerpots, which are only about 7.5cm tall, but they are ideal for succulents. You can just pop in one little leaf, and it will thrive in that very hot, free-draining pot.

Do you find that being in the garden or gardening helps with your writing?

I love writing outside. It's a very old habit of mine. I think because of this, very early on in my career I got into writing in ink. I write all my novels in longhand in a notebook, which is totally portable and doesn't need a battery pack. Apart from anything else, it means I don't get distracted by the computer or my phone, but I do, of course, get sidetracked by the garden.

I think every novelist will wax lyrical about the things that they do to stop themselves from working. I'd be very happy to spend an entire year not writing a thing and gardening every day. That's how badly the bug has bit. If I suddenly see something that needs deadheading or something is being eaten by bugs, then the book goes down and I'm off.

But saying that, I do find that gardening works very well with writing, because while you're doing something very undemanding but necessary and repetitive – like deadheading, which I do for about an hour every morning through the summer – I'm on autopilot. I'm not actually thinking about deadheading; instead, I'm thinking about a plot point that I'm struggling with or a character I'm developing.

You cannot write all day as it requires very intense focus. I think if you have two or three hours a day when you really focus on your writing, then for the rest of the day you'll not actively be writing but you'll be thinking about it. So why not think about it while deadheading sweet peas?

Do you think there's an element of storytelling in gardening?

The really special thing about a romantic garden is that it takes you by the hand and leads you on a walk, because you can't see everything at once. You always want to know what's around the corner, and you get little glimpses of a plant that you can't quite reach. That, in turn, is quite a meditative experience. So, our garden is a bit like a medieval labyrinth that leads you on a journey.

When people come to visit the garden, I always point them in a certain direction, which is partly to do with the story of the garden and how it grew in stages, but also partly because I know if they go in a certain way around it, they will get the big finish by ending up in the heart of the rose garden.

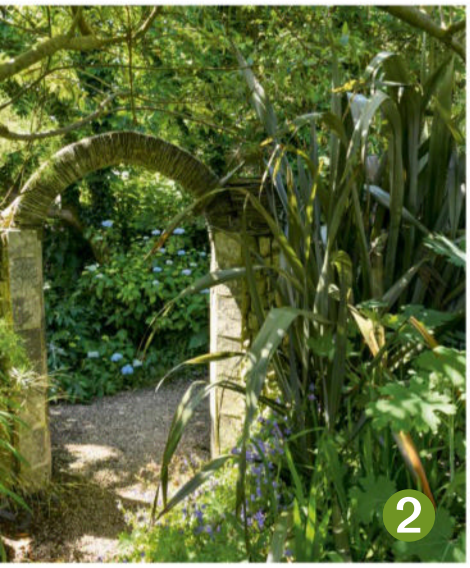
Every plant in this garden tells a story, whether it's one of frustration and defeat, or one of triumph. There are plants here that I vividly remember being given originally or being given their seed. I love touring around the UK and seeing how differently the plants I grow

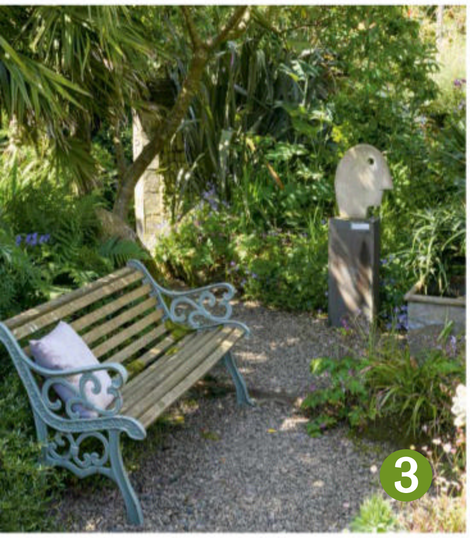
❶ Small terracotta pots housing Patrick's succulents collection make an attractive display

❷ Meandering paths lead visitors around the garden on a journey of discovery

> *"I'd be very happy to spend an entire year not writing a thing and gardening every day. If I see something that needs deadheading or something is being eaten by bugs, then the book goes down and I'm off"*

> “It’s no accident that England is a nation of gardeners – we all have our own little corners that are so different from each other”





① **The garden is open to visitors, including dogs, as part of the National Garden Scheme’s open days**

② **Densely planted Trevilley has a mix of styles, including a shade garden**

③ **Reflecting the owners’ creative interests, the garden contains sculptures and areas for writing**

in Cornwall vary from place to place. It amazes me how our climate and our conditions vary, even within counties.

I think it’s no accident that England is a nation of gardeners, – we all have our own little corners that are so different from each other. I’m always inspired by what people can grow that I can’t and the challenges that they seem to meet, and it makes me want to try again, because if they can grow that plant in Chester then maybe I can grow it in Cornwall.

What are your future plans for the garden?

I’m looking very hard at how we interact with wildlife. I’ve recently become a beekeeper, which is hugely exciting. I’m not just keeping honeybees down the lane, where they’re safely away from the footpath, I’m also actively keeping mason bees. The difference it makes to the pollination of your fruit trees will convince any gardener to do it.

I have a love-hate relationship with rodents. I dearly love the field mice, but I curse them when they come and eat my broad beans, which they’ve done for four different successions of planting this year. In defiance of them, I’ve now grown a crop of beans indoors.

Unfortunately, we also have rats, and they are a challenge. I would love them if I could, but they breed just too well. However, we now have barn owls living in two of our barns and I hear them hunting at night. I know they’re very active in the garden and I hope they are keeping the rats under control.

My other great pest is snails. We have no lawns to speak of, which means that we have no thrushes. So, snails are completely rampant here. What I need to do is encourage hedgehogs. I’ve now identified a corner of the garden for a little hedgehog house and I’m really hoping that the hedgehogs will discover it and do their worst with the snails.

We also have a thriving badger population, and badgers eat hedgehogs. With wildlife, it’s all about recognising the animals you have and the balance that you need to strike between them, and interfering as little as possible, but giving them a helping hand when need be. I think you have to learn to cope with active, and perhaps unwelcome, animals that come into your space – it’s all part of the system, so you just have to learn to be horrified while admiring them at the same time. ☐

NEXT MONTH We visit Katrina Roche’s small urban plot and learn how to welcome wildlife into any size of garden

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There's still plenty of time to enter our **2025 Gardens of the Year competition** and win some fabulous prizes, including having your garden photographed for the magazine! To give your garden the best chance of impressing our judges, make sure you capture it at its finest. Follow these expert tips from *Gardeners' World Magazine* photographer **Jason Ingram** to give yourself the best chance of being one of our six finalists.

Catch the best light

Set up your equipment

Smartphones can take great pictures, but for the best results, set your phone to its highest resolution and avoid inbuilt filters. If you are using a digital camera, it's best to shoot in large JPEG or RAW. Most importantly, make sure your lens is clean, whether you're using a phone or camera – a lens wipe or soft cloth will do the job.

Catch the best light

The optimum time to photograph your garden is usually early morning or late evening, known as the golden hour, when the light is at its softest. If you have to shoot during the daytime, pick a day with high cloud, which will act as a big soft diffuser. Shooting on a very sunny day, especially around midday, will produce photos that are high in contrast, with dark shadows, which can make the details and colours difficult to distinguish. I often shoot into the light, as this can add depth and perspective. When the light is directly behind you, photos can often look flat.

What to shoot

Think about the views that make your garden special to you, compositions that have a sense of place. Structures in the garden often act as a good starting point – they break up the areas of planting and read really well. Also think about the focal points you've created and frame your images around these elements. Close-up plant portraits are lovely but not unique to your garden, so take a step back and show the chosen plant in its wider setting.

Composing your photos

Try to include compositional elements that draw the eye into an image – leading lines such as a meandering path work well. Also scrutinise the foreground, mid- and background, and try to get some separation between these elements. Elevation can sometimes help, so having a stepladder to hand is a good idea.

Photography is often about what you exclude as much as what you include, so zooming in and out can help you decide what works best. Don't always position your subject in the centre – think about the rule of thirds and try placing it off to the left third or right third of an image, leaving the other two-thirds more open.

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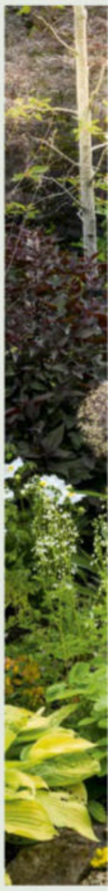
PHOTOS: OLIVER DIXON, JASON INGRAM



Great prizes to be won

Composing your photos

What to shoot

Meet our expert judges

Alan Titchmarsh
TV presenter and GW Magazine regular, Alan has created and cared for countless beautiful gardens of all sizes and style

Arit Anderson
Gardeners' World TV presenter and garden designer, Arit is also a passionate supporter of sustainable gardening

Ann-Marie Powell
Garden designer and presenter, Ann-Marie spearheads the My Real Garden online community

Kevin Smith
Editor of *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*

How to enter

1 GO TO GardenersWorld.com/garden-competition to enter.

2 UPLOAD at least six photos and tell us how you created your garden. Choose photos that show broad areas of your garden, not individual plants, and show the garden at its best – these could be from last summer. We would also like to see a photo of the garden before you transformed it, plus a photo of you in your garden.

3 ENTER by **9 June 2025**

If your garden is selected as a finalist, we will contact you in June to arrange a date for photography, which must be completed by mid-August.

Enter by midday on 9 June 2025 at
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Growing THE GOOD LIFE

It's mid-spring on **Sara Ward**'s smallholding, where she's rotating crops, controlling pests and creating a delicious broad bean hummus

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

> “I’ll be watching for the brief **elderflower season** so I can make a year’s worth of cordial”

Sara pods her broad beans directly into a container so she doesn’t lose any

May is the month to enjoy the warmth of the sun while we potter in the garden. Early crops, such as the broad beans that I planted last autumn, are now ready to harvest. Thankfully, with two bank holidays, there’s a bit of extra time to spend at the allotment preparing the beds for direct sowing.

Towards the end of the month, I’ll be watching for the brief elderflower season so I can make a year’s worth of cordial. This usually falls around half term, and I have happy memories of taking the children out to forage for these special flowers when they were younger. Now, I have a plentiful source at home and at the allotment – I just need long-handled loppers to reach the higher blooms.

May also marks the beginning of the honeybee swarming season and, because I am a beekeeper, I’m often called out by members of the public to collect unexpected visitors, pop them in a new hive and take them off to one of my apiaries.

Keep pace with crops

While we can marvel at the developing crops outside, once we are confident that the frosts are behind us, we can start to plant out the seedlings that have been nurtured inside. I like to make sure that there’s something growing in each bed throughout most of the year, and I can sometimes feel like a chambermaid at a busy hotel when I’m trying to perform a quick turnaround – clearing finished crops and getting beds ready for the new ones. Where possible, I plant in a four-year rotation system, which reduces the impact on the soil, minimises pests and diseases, and ensures that the same nutrients aren’t required two years in a row.

Another advantage of crop rotation is that the legume family – beans and peas – have nitrogen-fixing nodules attached to their roots. So, when I harvest my broad beans, I snap off the pods as they reach the desired size, and once all the pods are plucked off, rather than pulling up the roots, I cut the plant at soil level and let the stored nitrogen be absorbed into the soil. This creates the perfect environment for anything in the nitrogen-loving cabbage and broccoli family – such as hungry Brussels sprouts and cauliflowers.

Before I even think about planting out my seedlings, it’s really important to help them acclimatise to life alfresco by giving them day visits to the garden and bringing them back indoors at night. This process is

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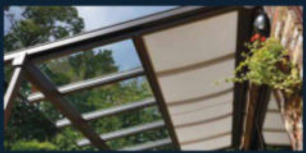

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called 'hardening off', and it helps prepare the plants for their forever homes outside. May is the perfect month for this and after a week or so, it should be safe to plant them in the ground or large pots.

Anti-pest control

Experience has taught me that stronger plants with thicker stems are slightly more resilient to slugs and, when planting, I like to give them a little extra protection by positioning them within a collar made from a cut ring of a plastic bottle. I'm not sure whether it's the rigid barrier or the sharp edge at the top, but I find this is a great way of giving newly planted squash and brassicas a first line of defence against the dusk raids of gastropods.

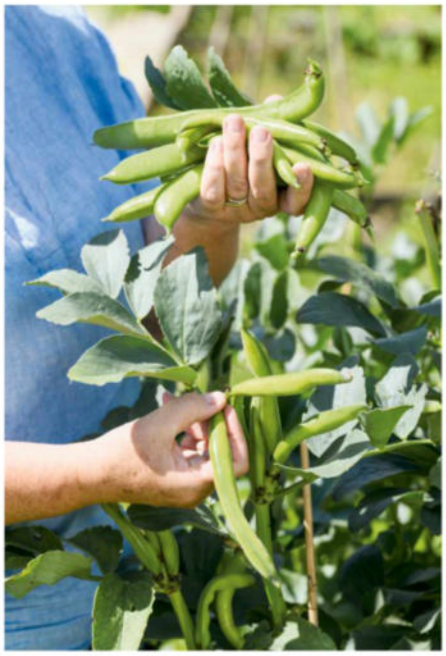
The leeks, which we sowed indoors at the beginning of the year, are now ready to go into the ground. I create a hole for each leek about 15cm deep and gently place each one as deep as possible before 'puddling them in' by topping up the hole with water rather than backfilling with soil. The part of the leek that grows underground maintains the traditional white stem, known as being 'blanched', which can also be achieved by earthing up the plants as they grow.

Shortly after the leeks are planted in tidy rows, I like to direct-sow parsnips in between. I find that these are good companion crops as the smell of the leeks helps to repel aphids and carrot fly that are on the lookout for this root crop.

A couple of years ago, my husband, Andy, built a support structure of wood and wire for our garden grapevine. This allows the fast-growing tendrils to have something to cling to as they sprawl far and wide. A little bit of guidance, and tying in now and then, will help train the vine to allow even spacing, ensuring that developing bunches of grapes can hang freely, not overcrowded, with good airflow to help maintain even ripening.

> “Parsnips and leeks are good companion crops as the smell of leeks helps repel aphids and carrot fly”

ABOVE Snip off elderflowers on a dry, sunny day, when the blooms are fully open **BELOW** Small broad beans are sweeter so pick pods when they are young and full



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Mara des Bois

Malwina

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Strawberry plants are easy to grow and all they require is a sunny, sheltered spot. Plants can be spaced 30cm (12in) apart in the open ground. Alternatively they can be grown in growbags (10 plants per bag) or containers.

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MALLING CENTENARY (early) - This new variety was specifically bred to put flavour back in to the berry. The fruits are very sweet and juicy. Heavy cropping. *Usually £22.95*
STR025 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

CAMBRIDGE FAVOURITE (mid) - This much loved strawberry is one of the heaviest cropping varieties available and can be relied on to crop well under a wide range of weather conditions. The berries are soft, sweet and juicy and have a very good flavour. Resistant to mildew. *Usually £20.95*
STR010 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £18.85 inc. p&p**

MARSHMELLO (mid) - A fantastic midseason variety, described by French chef Raymond Blanc as the sweetest strawberry he has ever tasted! The large, glossy-red berries are not firm enough for the supermarkets but it is a very popular variety on 'Pick Your Own' farms and has become a firm favourite amongst home gardeners. Excellent disease resistance. *Usually £22.95*
STR031 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

MALWINA (very late) - This fabulous tasting variety is an excellent choice for the garden as it is easy to grow and very disease resistant. The large berries are exceptionally sweet. Very late ripening, cropping well into August when most other summer fruiting varieties have finished cropping. *Usually £22.95*
STR018 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

MARA DES BOIS (perpetual) - Combines the aromatic flavour of the wild alpine strawberry with the fruit size and yield of the modern cultivars. When fully ripe, the medium sized berries are extremely fragrant and develop an intense flavour and aroma similar to the woodland strawberry. Resistant to mildew. Ripens Aug-Oct. *Usually £23.95*
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Marshmello

Fenella

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GIJNLIM - This male dominant F1 hybrid produces heavy crops of succulent green spears just one year after planting. It can also be grown as white asparagus if the plants are covered with a mound of sandy soil and harvested before they push through the ground. Crops early to mid season. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
ASP004 12 crowns - **ONLY £24.50 inc. p&p**

GUELPH MILLENNIUM - This male dominant F1 hybrid variety is exceptionally well adapted to cooler conditions and is therefore a very good choice for the UK climate. It performs well in a range of soils and produces heavier crops than many other varieties. Crops late season. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
ASP005 12 crowns - **ONLY £24.50 inc. p&p**

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MAY Jobs

✔ **Sowing** Many seeds can be direct-sown into prepared soil. Beetroot is perfect for filling spare corners of beds and, while the roots may take a while to grow to full size, a few young leaves can be picked occasionally and added to salads.

✔ **Growing** Since most of the sugar snap peas and mangetout available in supermarkets are grown in Africa, if you grow your own you can be confident that not only are you getting the freshest crop but you are also helping the environment. I like to choose purple varieties as the pods are so pretty against the green foliage.

✔ **Controlling** The brightly coloured asparagus beetle can be picked off easily and its eggs wiped away.

✔ **Supporting** Provide support to runner beans as they grow, tying them in if needed.

✔ **Thinning** Lettuces, such as ‘Little Gem’, that we’ve grown from seed can be thinned out and transplanted to their final positions.

✔ **Hardening off** Cucumber plants can be planted outdoors beside a bamboo wigwam or trellis for support.

ABOVE Replant thyme that has outgrown its pot, ensuring it has good drainage **LEFT** Thin out lettuces such as ‘Little Gem’ when they are large enough to handle

✔ **Replanting** A collection of patio herbs is both attractive and conveniently placed near the house for regular picking. Replant smaller pots of thyme to give them more space for growth.

✔ **Enjoying** There’s something special about harvesting your own lemons in the UK. I have a slice in an iced drink, then eat it slowly since it’s so precious!

Sara's broad bean hummus served with toasted bread and home-grown sugar-snap peas

Broad bean hummus

Serves 6
Prep time: 10 minutes

Bring a taste of the Mediterranean to a leisurely lunch using broad beans, one of the first crops to be harvested in spring. I keep a jar of tahini in the cupboard at all times and most of the other ingredients can be collected from the garden. Fresh mint brings a freshness to the dish and complements its green colour.

This is my favourite way to enjoy broad beans and, as we've grown them ourselves, it's both delicious and sustainable. This recipe works just as well if you are using vegetables that you've previously frozen. Whether you peel each bean or not is a matter of personal preference, but as it's all blended together, I'd rather save myself the time and enjoy the extra fibre!

Ingredients

- 300g broad beans, podded
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 tbsp tahini (sesame paste)
- Small handful fresh mint leaves
- ½ lemon, juice only
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Olive oil to serve

Method

1 Boil the broad beans until tender.

2 Reserve the cooking water and set aside. Put the beans into a food processor along with the garlic and tahini, and blitz until smooth.

3 Add the mint leaves and lemon juice, then pulse until they are combined.

4 Adjust the consistency using the reserved cooking water, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

5 Serve drizzled with olive oil and accompanied by toasted bread or crudites. Enjoy.

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If you've been inspired to produce your own food, go to **GardenersWorld.com/gyo-offers** for a great selection of GYO offers to suit whatever size space you have.

NEXT MONTH Sara tends to her strawberries, picks redcurrants and gets busy with her bees

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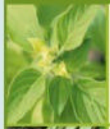
May

Growing guide

Make the most of warm soil this month by sowing successionally for continuous crops

Sow indoors 🟪 **Plant/sow outdoors** 🟩 **Harvest** 🟧

Key crops for May	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
 **Basil** This tender summer herb offers anti-inflammatory nutrients. Pick the top leaves to encourage new sideshoots.				🟪	🟪	🟩	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧				**Tips** Basil grows well in pots in the sunniest, most sheltered spot in the garden. Sow every two weeks for harvests all summer. **Sow** ↓ on surface **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 15cm between rows
Carrots Rich in vitamins, minerals and fibre but low in calories, which makes eating carrots ideal if you're watching your weight.			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	**Tips** Surround the crop with a fleece barrier at least 60cm high to prevent carrot flies getting in and laying their eggs on the roots. **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 30cm between rows
Courgettes Providing fibre, potassium and folate, this heart-friendly veg is incredibly adaptable – grill, roast, stir-fry or bake.				🟪	🟪🟩	🟩	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			**Tips** Choose a site in full sun, dig plenty of organic matter into the soil, then plant out after the last frost. Keep plants well watered. **Sow** ↓ 2.5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 90cm apart ⤢ 90cm between rows
Endives A good source of folate. Don't discard the outer leaves, which are high in nutrients. Lightly cook for a mellower flavour.					🟩	🟩	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	**Tips** To reduce bitterness, blanch each full-grown plant for 10 days by covering it with a forcing jar or bucket. **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 23cm apart ⤢ 30-35cm between rows
Leeks Richer in carotenoids, folate and vitamin C than their onion cousins, these mild-tasting alliums are a versatile ingredient.	🟧	🟪🟧	🟪🟧	🟩🟧	🟩	🟩		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	**Tips** Draw up soil around the stems to aid blanching. Plant a late crop into ground vacated by early potatoes. **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤢ 30-38cm between rows
Okra With a carbohydrate that fuels friendly gut bacteria and supports digestion, okra may slow absorption and balance blood sugar.				🟪	🟪		🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			**Tips** Soak the hard seeds in warm water for a couple of hours before sowing. Grow in a humid greenhouse. **Sow** ↓ 0.5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 40-60cm apart ⤢ 60-75cm between rows
Parsley Rich in heart-friendly folate, vitamin C and potassium as well as eye-protective carotenoids. Use the stalks for stock.			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧				**Tips** Make successional sowings throughout spring and early summer for a continuous crop. Any surplus leaves can be frozen. **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 15cm between rows
Runner beans Providing bone-building nutrients such as calcium, magnesium and vitamin K, steam, stir-fry or lightly boil these beans.				🟪	🟪🟩	🟩	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			**Tips** Grow nasturtiums nearby to lure away blackfly, and harvest the pods regularly, when they are young, tender and stringless. **Sow** ↓ 5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤢ 60cm between rows
Spinach Rich in natural nitrates, which improve blood flow by relaxing blood vessels and lowering blood pressure. Add to stir-fries.	🟧		🟩	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩🟧	🟩🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	**Tips** Prepare the ground by adding plenty of organic matter, and sow successionally for harvests over a long period. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤢ 30cm between rows
Winter cabbages A source of calcium, vitamin C, protein and fibre, cabbage is also cardio-protective. Stir-fry, steam or braise.	🟧	🟧	🟧		🟩	🟩						🟧	**Tips** Sow in small batches to avoid gluts. Cover with fine-mesh netting to protect from cabbage white butterflies. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤢ 60cm between rows

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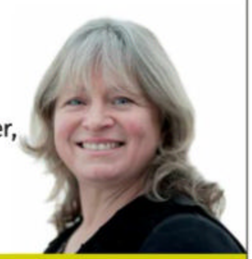
Gardeners' Question Time

Our experts tackle your queries, including a droopy tree peony, some scorched house plant foliage and an overgrown clematis

Juliet Sargeant
Juliet is an RHS Gold award-winning garden designer and regular contributor on radio and television.

Bob Flowerdew
Bob is the author of dozens of gardening books, as well as a radio presenter and organic gardener.

Anne Swithinbank
A keen fruit, vegetable and house-plant grower, Anne was formerly the glasshouse supervisor at RHS Garden Wisley.



Q Which long-lived plants for a seafront balcony?

Ruth Talbot, Cornwall

A JULIET SAYS Salt winds will be a challenge in a situation such as this. Because the space is probably fairly long and narrow, there will be no opportunity to create more sheltered spots, so all the plants will need to be equally resilient.

For low maintenance and a level of permanence I'd be thinking about shrubs, climbers and grasses, with also perhaps a few bulbs.

From a design perspective, it will be important to have some repetition along the length of the balcony and for this a reliable, robust evergreen will be essential, as well as equally reliable seasonal interest.

Corokia x *virgata* is a New Zealand native that is bomb-proof, as is *Olearia* 'Compacta', which is a dwarf form of the fast-growing daisy bush. *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius* 'Silver Jubilee' is also a good choice, with a lovely pink flower and finely cut silver leaf, rather like rosemary. *Salvia rosmarinus* Prostrata Group will hang down and soften the edges of your containers.

Q&A TEAM ANSWER
Balconies by the sea

***Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius* is ideal in windy coastal locations**

Feijoa is drought- and salt-tolerant, but needs shelter from wind

A BOB SAYS Use a loam-based compost, say John Innes No.3, as this will last longer than a multi-purpose. Lighten it with perlite or vermiculite so less of a strain is placed on the balcony. Both materials are light and encourage good drainage and aeration, though have almost no fertility.

Once the compost's fertility has run down over time, start adding liquid feed to the water much more often. Alternatively, give top dressings of fertiliser mixed into the uppermost layer.

Your balcony is probably nearly frost free, but windy and with possible heavy salt sprays. Be ready to cover your plants during blustery periods with a plastic sheet (shower curtains work well) or rinse off salt deposits.

I'd risk a lemon tree, or definitely an *Feijoa sellowiana*. It's also worth trying a 'Siegerrebe' or 'Muscat Hamburg' grapevine. Both can be kept compact with regular hard pruning.

PHOTOS: MARIA SCARD; PAUL DEBOIS

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Q How can I prune a huge 'Hot Lips'?

Heather Bunce, North Devon

A JULIET SAYS 'Hot Lips' is a half-hardy salvia, so prune it in early spring, hopefully after the frosts have passed, but before it really gets going producing new shoots.

It is best to prune this plant by about one third each year to keep it bushy, but if they are leggy you can prune them hard.

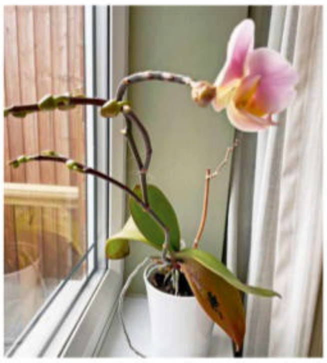
Prune *Salvia* 'Hot Lips' in spring and it will bounce back quickly

Q Trailing root on moth orchid: time to repot?

Karen Sainsbury, West Midlands

A ANNE SAYS It's normal for moth orchids to have some roots outside the pot. However, it's good to refresh the compost every few years. When you decide to do so, wait for flowering stems to die back completely and gently remove loose compost.

Using the same pot or one a bit larger, repot in fresh, bark-based orchid mix. Keep inside roots in and outside ones out.



Trailing roots such as this are natural on moth orchids

Hoeing provides a quick, temporary fix for weedy gravel paths

Q Weeds and grass in my gravel path: what to do?

Anne Thomas, Suffolk

A BOB SAYS I'd seldom recommend a herbicide, for all the usual reasons. Instead, think of what is causing these weeds.

Any gravel path with lawn beside it will be invaded by the grass. Proper edging will help, if it is not in place already. Also, are any weeds or self-seeding plants going to seed nearby? If so you'll never keep the path clear of emerging plants.

Finally, is the gravel clean of soil and humus? If not, it will always be hard to stop weeds. You can wash it, or if it's got a lot of organic matter in it, you may need to remove it.

You could kill the existing weeds off under an opaque geotextile fabric, itself held down with fresh gravel, either to be removed after a few months or as a new layer to the path. Deeper gravel is always worth investing in as it works better.

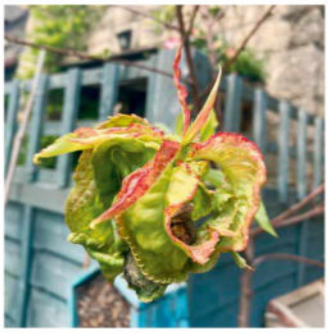
Alternatively, just pour boiling water over the weeds. This kills most instantly. A few will regrow and need another treatment, but it's very effective and also helps to wash the gravel clean.

Q Can I grow ageratums indoors, with enough light?

C. Cornie, Oregon, USA

A ANNE SAYS Possibly, but you might have to turn plants regularly so they don't pull towards the light. Cultivars of these pretty Mexican annuals with fluffy blue, white or pink flowers range in height from 15-75cm. Look for shorter types and place them in good but not harsh light, and give them regular, balanced liquid feeds.

Ageratums come from hot climates and need lots of sun



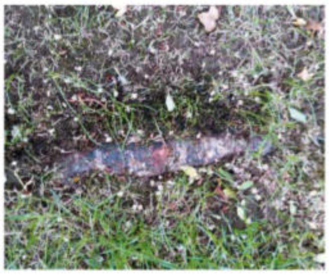
Peach leaf curl is more of a problem in wet parts of the UK

Q Can I cure my peach?

James, Oxfordshire

A JULIET SAYS This is peach leaf curl. Spores are carried on the wind, especially in wet air, so it's worse in winter and spring. It weakens a plant, distorting fruit.

You can stop it by removing affected leaves and covering the plant with its own personal 'greenhouse' through the wetter months to keep the rain off.



Old cherry trees commonly produce roots at soil surface

Q Tree roots in my lawn – help!

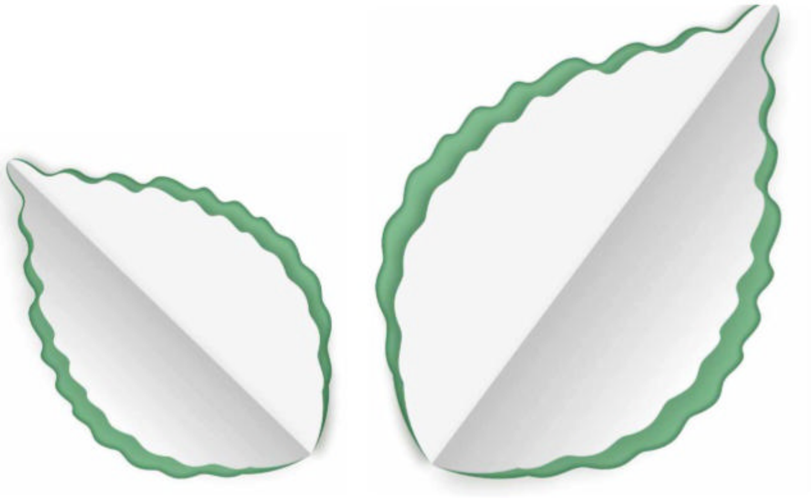
Susan, by email

A BOB SAYS Would these be from a flowering cherry? If so then it's probably near the end of its life, so I'd not be too worried about removing these.

Dig the soil out underneath and saw through. Don't just remove the largest bit on the surface – also dig and pull up as many smaller roots as possible. This kind of extremely hard treatment can cause the plant to throw up water shoots.

Root-pruning is drastic and may destabilise the tree, but the only alternative is to raise the level of the sward with topsoil, then add a layer of new turf.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; TIM SANDALL



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Q Can I only make liquid feed with nettles?

Alix Jones, by email

A BOB SAYS No, lots of plants – even bindweed – will work. I find borage and burdock superb. Just bear in mind that some leaves contain harmful substances, but these are usually broken down as they rot.

Once rotted, the liquid must be well diluted. It must only be given to strong plants, not ones under stress and never to seedlings, and applied only to soil or compost.

Q Plants are fine in soil, so why do they hate too-big pots?

Patrick, Hampshire

A JULIET SAYS It is very hard for us to imagine how alien an environment a pot is for a plant; there's soil (or compost), we water… what else could they possibly need?

One of the main differences is in the drainage. A pot holds water in a way that soil in the ground would not. In the ground there is space for the water to move through the soil and away from the plant roots. However, in a pot that drainage is artificially retarded. That is fine, as long as the roots are large enough and established enough to suck up the excess moisture. If, however, there is too much soggy compost around delicate, young roots, they will rot away.

Pack more in if your pots are too big, or use a smaller pot

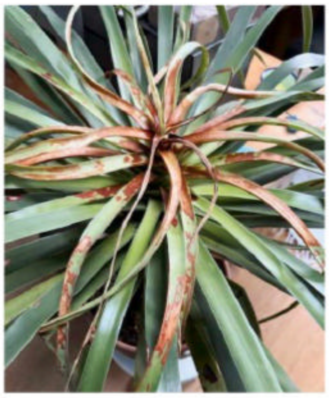
Q Why is brown foliage on my dracaena?

Susie Rabin, London

A ANNE SAYS Looking at your picture I would say that this is probably physical damage caused by too much harsh sun.

I appreciate tough-leaved *Dracaena draco* originates from sunny places like the Canary Islands, Madeira and Cape Verde. However, in a warm room during winter, when light levels are low, plants are likely to make weak, sappy growth which is vulnerable to scorch. As the sun intensifies in spring, this soft growth could easily suffer. Proximity to a cold, single-glazed window in winter could have the same results but is less likely.

Your best bet is to move the plant into indirect light and remove the damaged tip by cutting beneath it. The plant should sprout new growth but could end up as a wider, more branching specimen.



Indoor growth can be soft and vulnerable to sun scorch

Nutrient imbalance and shade may cause weak, tall growth

Q Droopy flower stems on tree peony. Any tips?

John, Lincolnshire

A ANNE SAYS Perhaps weak flower stems are an issue with this cultivar of tree peony. They grow well in sun or light shade, but a gloomy site by trees could encourage weak stem growth. If the plant is young, moving it to a better spot could be a plan, either in September or when the buds are bursting next spring.

Avoid nitrogen-rich feeds or mulches but instead apply a high-potash fertiliser to strengthen cell walls in the stems, which will make them less droopy.

In the meantime, supports are the answer. Cage-like supports would be tricky to fit over the woody framework of a tree peony, so look for open-sided supports, often called 'bows'. These fit neatly into the side of a plant to support new growth and flowers, either independently or linked to form circles.

Q Where and when is best to plant out peonies?

Jemima Trivedi, by email

A JULIET SAYS Peonies grow at their best planted in full sun with rich, moisture-retentive but free-draining soil and a good organic mulch.

They are hungry and slightly fussy garden plants, forming mature clumps and flowering for many years if given optimum growing conditions. In the right type of soil they are actually pretty low maintenance, being both disease-free and pest-resilient – even rabbits and deer stay away from them.

It is cheaper to buy peonies when they are dormant as bare roots in autumn and winter. You will need to prepare the soil well before they arrive, so you can get them in the ground straight away. Soak the roots for a couple of hours before and then plant in a generous hole, but not too deep. The shoots should sit only about three centimetres below the surface. Be careful not to mulch over these.

Q&A HOT TOPIC
Peonies

Regular mulching is the easiest way to ensure strong flowering

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

Q&A gardeners' question time

Q Do you have any advice for more cutting back a huge clematis 'Wisley Cream'?

Kim A, by email

A JULIET SAYS This evergreen clematis is an early-flowering type in group 1, so it doesn't need much pruning, except for tidying. It flowers on the previous year's growth in late winter and early spring, so the best time to prune is just after flowering.

Having taken out quite a lot of the plant already, and now that we are going into summer, I'd leave it alone for the rest of this growing season. This will give it time to recover, ready for your assault next February or March.

It should be fine with being cut either right down to the ground, or back to two or three main stems, which you can use to start its new course over your fence.

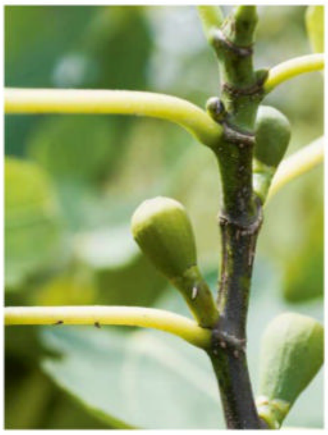
A well established clematis will recover quickly from hard pruning

Q Wildfire destroyed my home, but not my fig. Can I root-propagate?

Alexandra, Los Angeles, USA

A BOB SAYS I'm so sorry to hear this. Fortunately, it's hard to kill a fig. It will likely sprout again from the roots, not necessarily close to the old trunk but probably nearby.

Once these have reached knee height, excavate, detach and pot up, ideally with many fine roots and a chunk of main root they're coming from.



Figs have large, searching root systems so bounce back fast

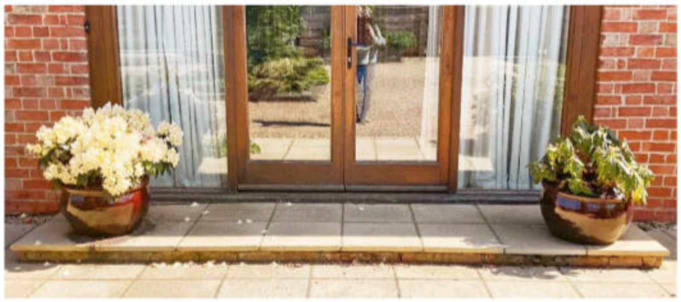
Q Why is one of these plants poorly?

Anna, Cambridgeshire

A BOB SAYS You say these have been treated identically, are of the same age, are in the same compost and are in part shade.

It could be that morning sun catches one after a cold night which then defrosts too rapidly. Or vine weevils may have found one plant but not the other.

However, it could be that the drainage hole in one of the pots is blocked? The healthy plant's pot has a dark, presumably wet, stain from underneath, while the sick plant container does not have such a stain. Unless this difference is because you have given up watering the poorly plant, this is likely to be because of a blocked drainage hole.



Wilted foliage can mean the roots are rotting in too much water

Keep an eye on plants in tricky rooms and be ready to move them

Q What plant for a dark room in fluctuating heat?

Sharon Russell, Scottish Borders

A ANNE SAYS Wildly varying temperatures are tricky. Start by buying a maximum/minimum thermometer to see what your highs and lows are. I'm imagining a range of perhaps 7-23°C.

Starting with taller plants, bird of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) is tough and tolerates both low and warm temperatures. This would probably bloom in spring and could go outside in summer. Urn plant, *Aechmea fasciata*, has coarse, silver-banded leaves and looks good even out of bloom.

Durable *Begonia* 'Lucerna' bears thin, silver-spotted leaves on cane-like stems, and if it does falter you can always prune hard and move it to a better spot.

Smaller choices include peperomias, the dinner plate plant (*Pilea peperomioides*) and trailing rosary vine (*Ceropegia linearis* subsp. *woodii*).

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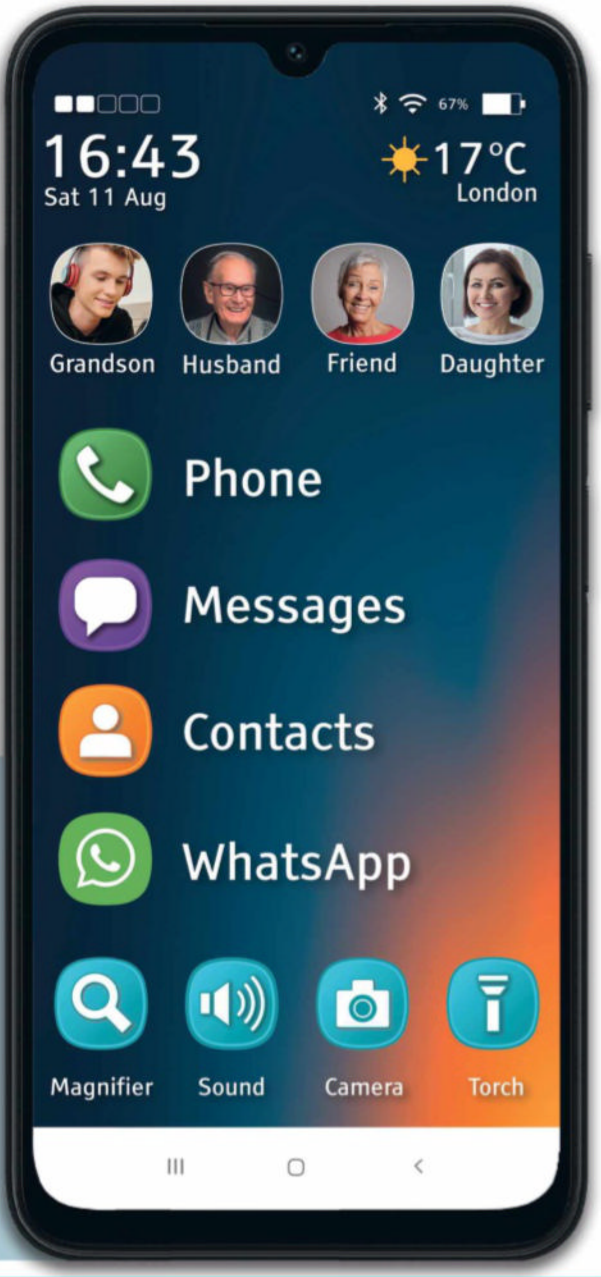

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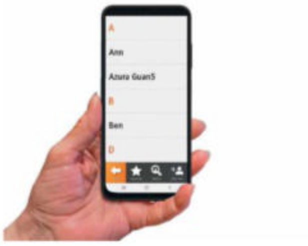

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Puzzles

Take a break from the garden with these brain-teasers

Step by step

By changing one letter each time to make a new word, can you transform STEM into BUDS in five steps or less?

STEM

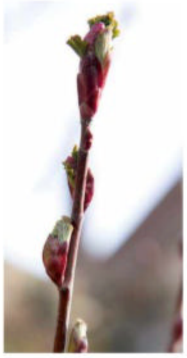
_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

BUDS



Going wild

O	G	R	F	D	R	I	B	Y	D	A	L
R	B	U	T	T	E	R	F	L	Y	I	F
M	E	S	O	H	R	U	S	O	E	U	B
O	E	O	G	T	E	E	O	S	E	A	D
G	B	A	O	T	R	D	U	O	T	B	E
N	Y	D	R	E	E	O	G	R	U	S	E
O	E	Y	F	R	M	U	S	E	R	O	H
R	N	G	O	R	G	D	Y	B	H	T	E
U	O	L	O	L	O	Y	E	L	O	O	D
S	H	D	G	I	R	D	W	M	O	U	G
E	S	O	N	G	T	H	R	U	S	H	O
B	A	E	L	O	M	O	U	A	D	Y	L

Can you find these ten creatures that might be attracted to a wildlife friendly garden?

BAT
BUTTERFLY
DORMOUSE
FROG
HEDGEHOG
HONEYBEE
LADYBIRD
MOLE
MOTH
SONG THRUSH

What's in a name?

Use each letter in the grid once to complete these eight common Latin plant names

A	E	O	A	P	N
A	N	E	T	R	L
S	U	T	I	A	R
A	R	A	N	S	L
A	S	S	I	E	A
U	V	E	S	A	P

_ A _ _ (small)
_ _ T _ _ (yellow)
_ _ A _ _ (tall)
_ _ _ E _ (golden)
_ O _ _ _ (rose-pink)
_ _ T _ _ _ (cultivated)
_ _ _ N _ _ _ (spiny)
_ _ _ _ A _ _ (creeping)

Bee beautiful

Unscramble the anagrams to spell out four early summer bloomers irresistible to bees

MACAU PLAN ______________

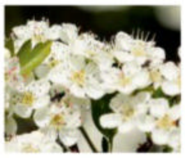
A LENTIL POT ______________

PARDON SNAG ______________

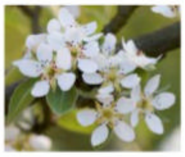
BRAVE SCUM ______________

Blossom time

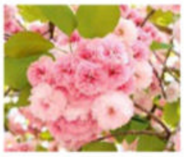
Here are four trees famed for their spring blossom – but they've got a bit muddled. Can you match the correct genus and species to each picture?



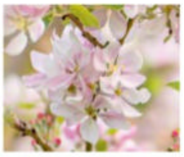
PRUNUS COMMUNIS ______________



MALUS MONOGYNA ______________



PYRUS SYLVESTRIS ______________



CRATAEGUS SERRULATA ______________

PHOTOS: GETTY/ALEX MANDERS, CLIVE NIHCOLS, JACKY PARKER, SANDRA STANDBRIDGE; JASON INGRAM; SARAH CUTTLE

Puzzle solutions over page ▶

Crossword

Put down your trowel, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead...

ACROSS

1 It's time to __ tender plants raised indoors (6,3)

7 Check for scarlet __ beetles on plants of the same name (4)

8 __ *reptans* is a late spring bloomer with deep blue flowers (5)

9 __ plant is a cool name for *Hylotelephium spectabile* (3)

10 Trees of the ulmus genus (4)

12 *Cupressus sempervirens* is better known as __ cypress (7)

13 Handy tool for pruning hedges, for example (6)

16 Plant out dahlia __ when the risk of frost has passed (6)

19 Botanical language (5)

20 Colourful moss vital in the creation of peat bogs (8)

22 Describes a leaf, for example, shaped like an egg (5)

24 Organic matter useful as a soil improver (6)

25 Fungal disease of lawns (4-3)

DOWN

1 Fragrant, spring-blooming bulbs (9)

2 Pick stems of this tart-tasting plot favourite as they develop (7)

3 Latin name meaning taller, as in *Primula* __ (7)

4 Pungent plot staples usually grown from sets (6)

5 Cosy protection for young seedlings in case of frost (6)

6 *Prunus cerasifera*, or cherry __ , has white spring blossom (4)

11 Small magnolia with fragrant pink-purple blooms (5)

14 Common name for *Quercus ilex* (4,3)

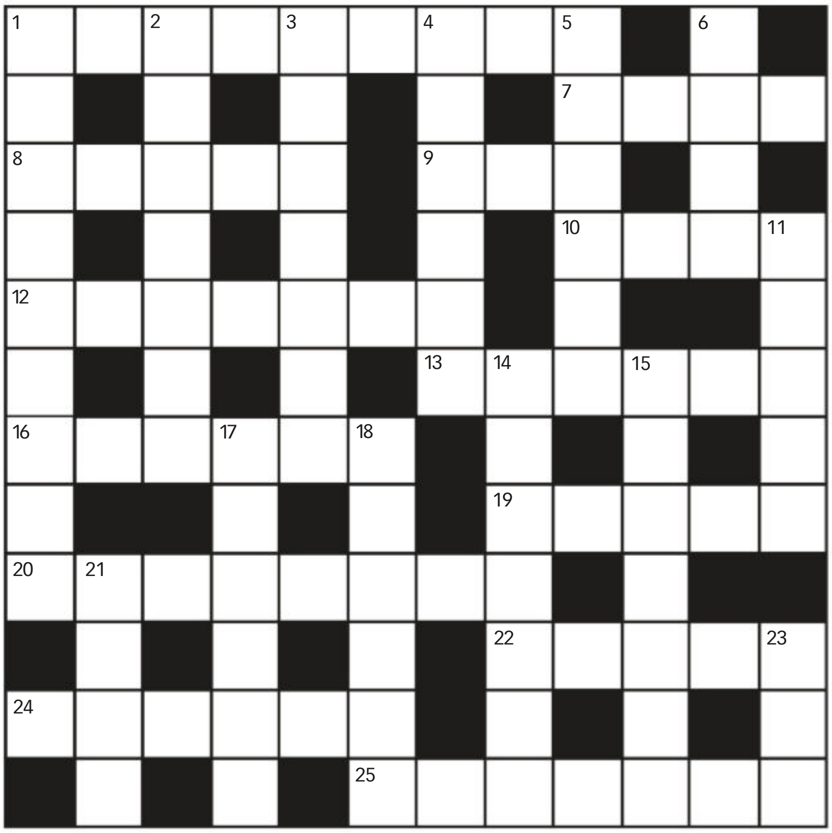
15 __ *officinalis* is the formal name of marsh mallow (7)

17 __ *affine* is also known as Persian violet (6)

18 *Geum* 'Blazing __' blooms from late spring (6)

21 Climbers such as sweet __ may need support as they grow (4)

23 __grass grows in shallow seas and sheltered waters (3)



CROSSWORD AND PUZZLES COMPILED BY NICOLA TREVETT

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

What's in a name? Nana, lutea, elata, aurea, rosea, sativa, spinosa, reptans

Bee beautiful campanula, *potentilla*, *snapdragon*, *verbascum*

Step by step There are several possible solutions, including: stem seem sees bees beds buds

Blossom time *Crataegus monogyna*, *Pyrus communis*, *Prunus serrulata*, *Malus sylvestris communis*

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

ACROSS 1 Harden off **7** Lily **8** Ajuga **9** Ice **10** Elms **12** Italian **13** Shears **16** Tubers **19** Latin **20** Sphagnum **22** Ovate **24** Manure **25** Take-all

DOWN 1 Hyacinths **2** Rhubarb **3** Elatior **4** Onions **5** Fleece **6** Plum **11** Susan **14** Holm oak **15** Althaea **17** Exacum **18** Sunset **21** Peas **23** Eel

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Issue number 411

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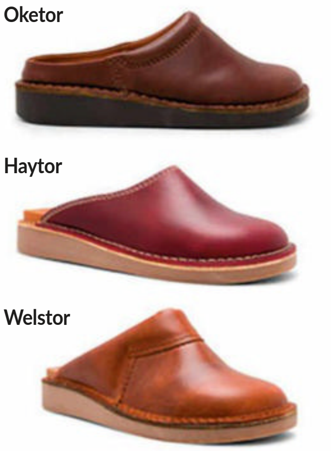

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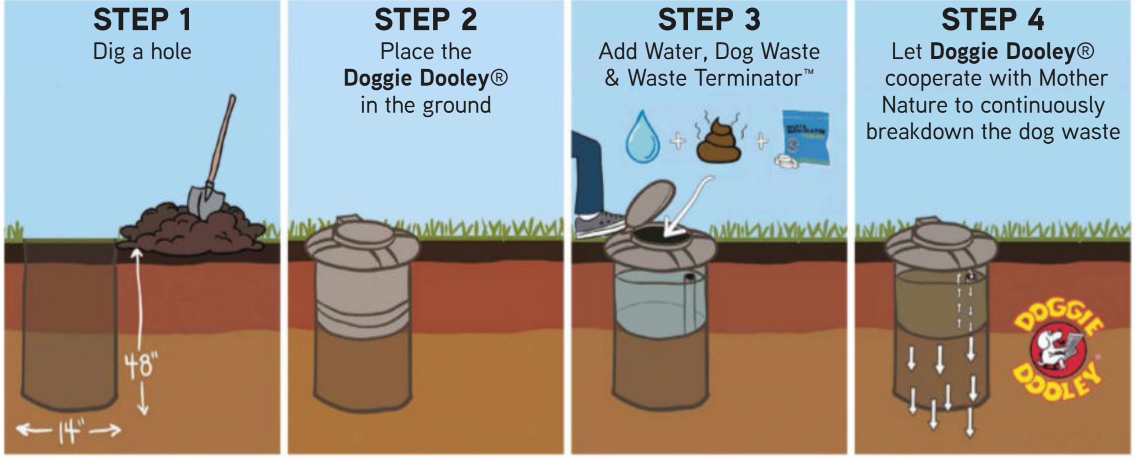
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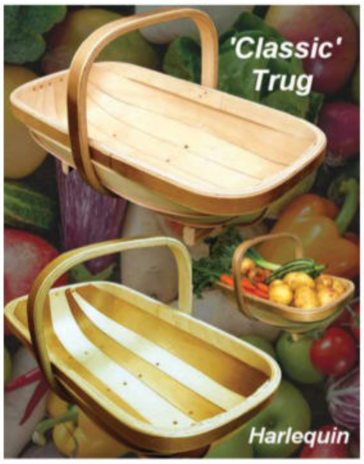

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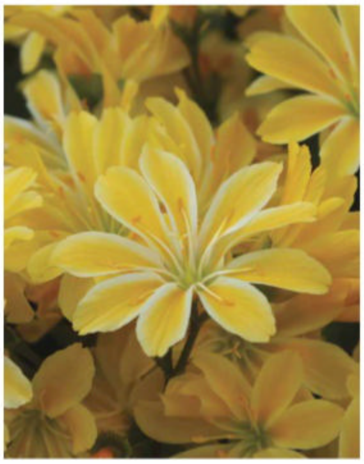

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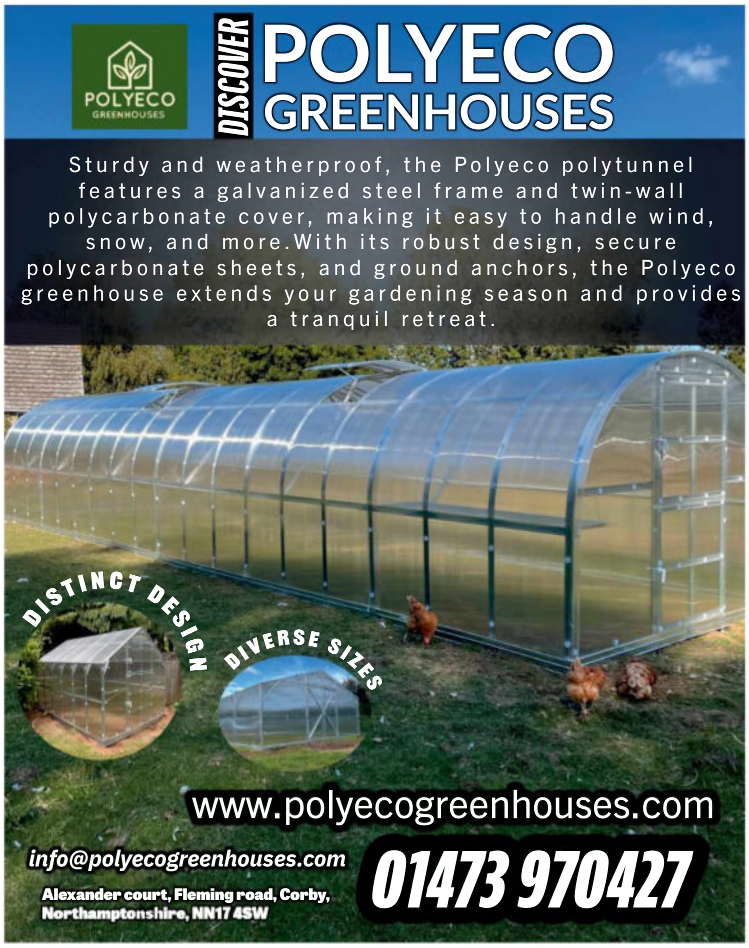

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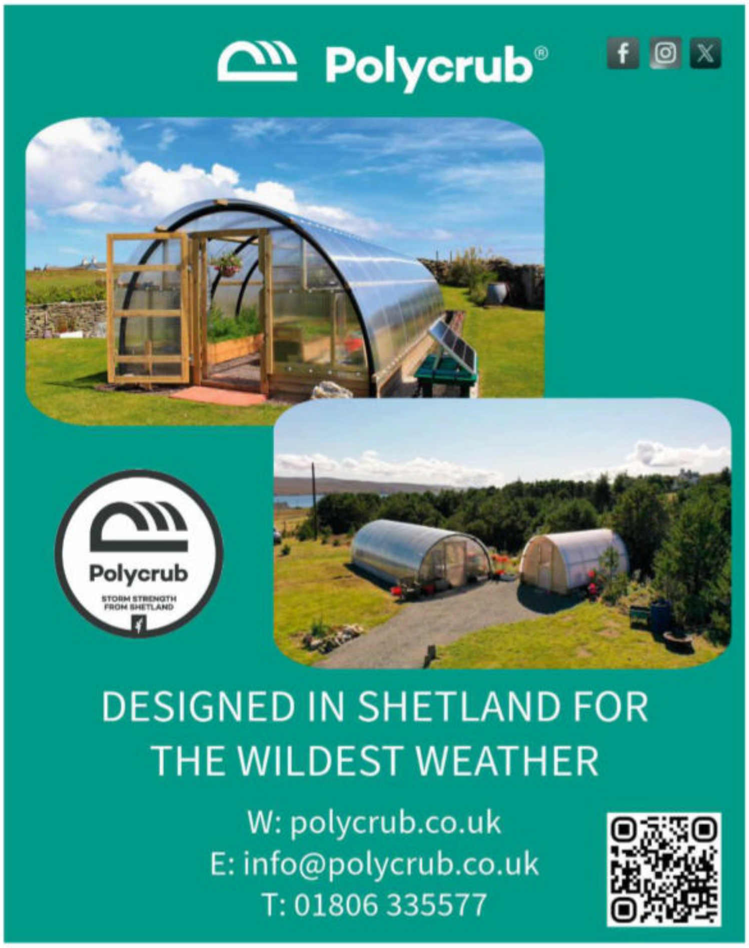

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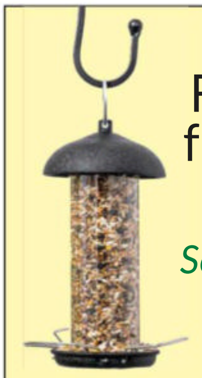

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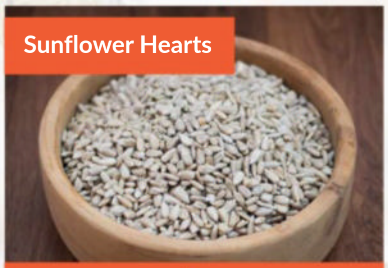

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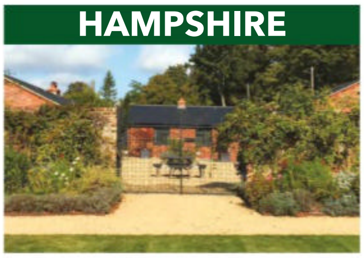

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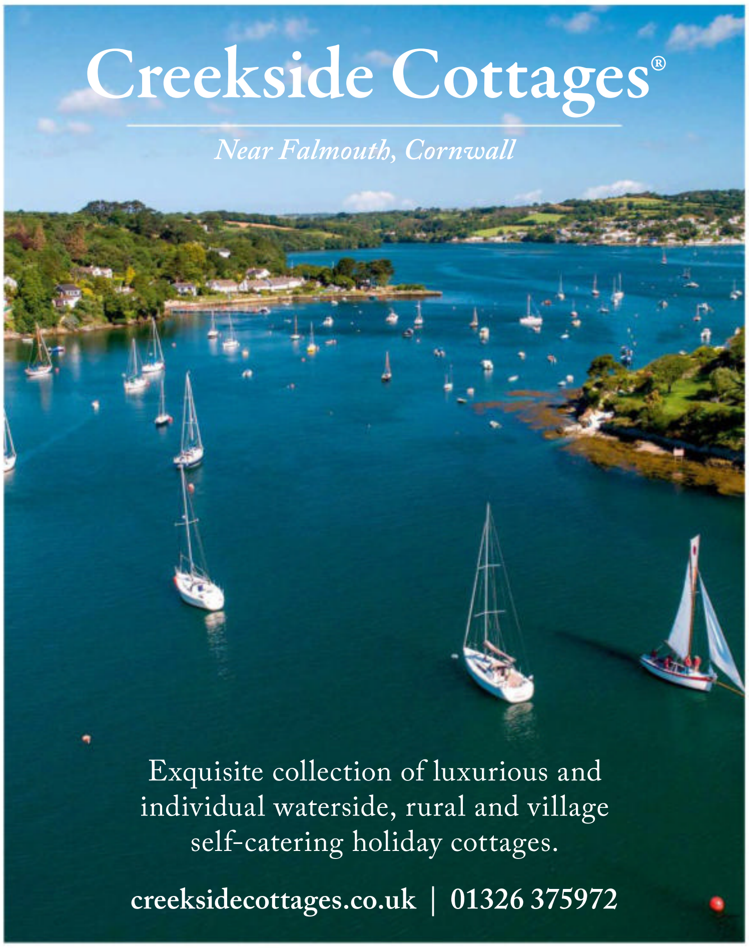

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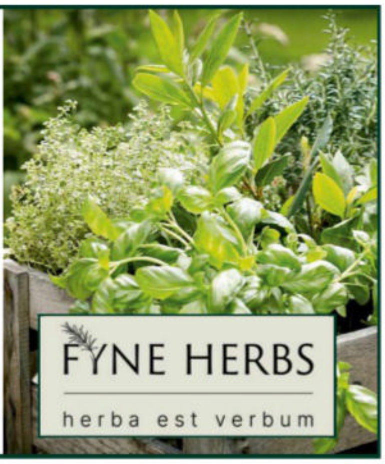

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Tales from Titchmarsh

Fashions may come and go at the Chelsea Flower Show, but the one thing that will always be in style is the event itself, says **Alan**

It's Showtime! May is when the garden erupts into something worth looking at (hopefully), and growers and garden designers flex their muscles and show off their wares and their talents. The prime catwalk for both has, since 1913, taken place in the grounds of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, and is regarded as a barometer for what's in, what's out, and what's the way forward, especially in terms of garden design.

> "The prime catwalk for gardeners, Chelsea is regarded as a barometer for what's in, what's out, and what's the way forward"

Like as not the extravaganza this year will be accompanied by a little bit of controversy. Don't ask me why or what, since only on the opening day will we be able to set eyes on the creations that will have been promoted in the hope of whetting our collective appetites, but a little bit of controversy is always a good thing. It keeps us on our toes and reminds us that even in gardening there are movements – and plants – that polarise opinion.

It's all too easy to criticise Chelsea and I am ready and willing to do so myself on occasion, in spite of the fact that I am a devotee of the event. It allows me to catch up with friends 'in the business' and view other folks' ideas as to what is the latest 'must have'. Here can be found the newest trends in gardening fashion – try to spot the ones that will catch on as distinct from a nine days wonder (or, in this case, a five days wonder).

We've had a few of them. Do you remember *Potentilla* 'Red Ace' – a shrubby potentilla that was, indeed, red, when the wind was in the south-west at no more than ten miles an hour, when there was an 'r' in the month and when the sun shone for only three hours out of every 24. I am being facetious, but you get my drift. The variety is still available but comes with the descriptive rider: "Bright vermilion red flowers… tending to fade to orange in hot weather and full sun." Indeed it does.

Then there is that little standard willow called 'Flamingo' with pink and white leaves that scorch a dirty brown if the sun is too bright, the rain too heavy or the wind too strong. It still walks out of the big garden shows by the hundred every summer and I long to say to the unsuspecting buyer "Noooo!".

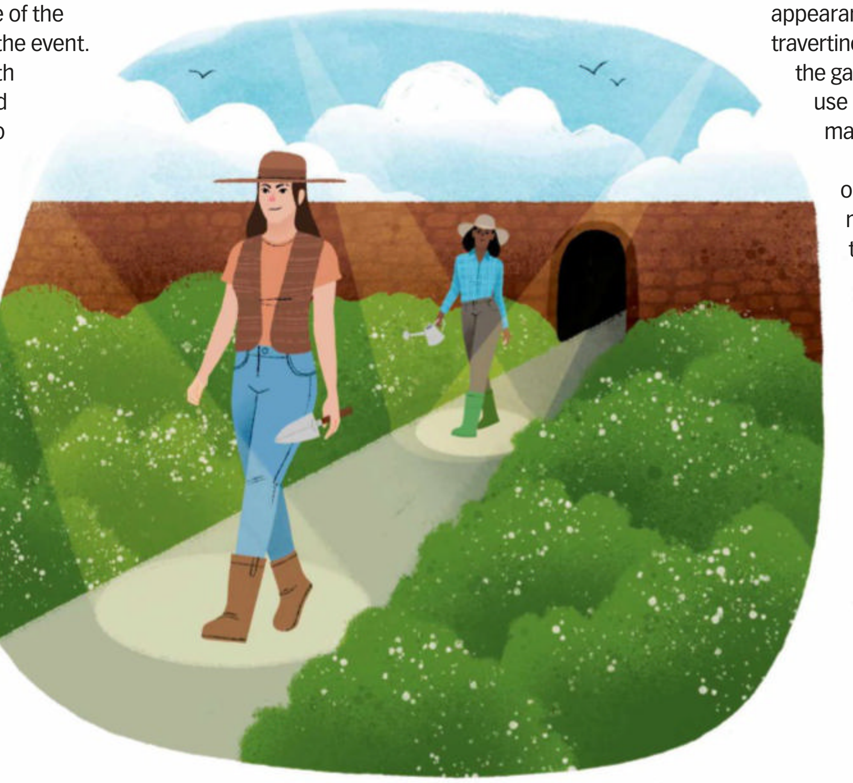
But then that's just me. There have been other plants at Chelsea that have become reliable garden staples. The garden I made for *Woman's Own* magazine in 1983 sported a plant that was virtually unknown at the time: *Melianthus major*, with its serrated-edged pinnate leaves of grey-green. Regarded at the time as rather tender, it has since come through every winter with me, having been mulched with a hefty layer of compost. I absolutely love this plant and it always reminds me fondly of my first Chelsea garden.

This year we have Monty's garden for dogs. As a fellow presenter who also had dogs in my *Gardeners' World* garden at Barleywood I salute Monty's bravery and am looking forward to seeing how canines and plants can be integrated. At Barleywood I settled for a dedicated path from the bottom of the garden to the top, with a rough area of grass half-way up that was forever known as Pooh Corner. Need I say more. Oh, and the dogs loved the borders when I had dressed them with blood, fish and bone meal. A word to the wise: blood, fish and bone produces in man's best friend the most horrendous halitosis.

In recent shows there has been a greater emphasis on planting rather than hard landscaping, which is welcome both in terms of cost and appearance. I can 'ooh' and 'ah' at travertine paving and green oak but the gardens that rely on the artful use of plants are the ones that make my heart sing.

I've had my fill of 'rewilding' on a domestic scale – give me true biodiversity every time – and hope that no-one thinks the time is right to create a 'Trampoline Garden'. If ever they do, then I really will have something to say.

A whirligig washing line? Well, Mrs T would be full of admiring glances. Grrrr!



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